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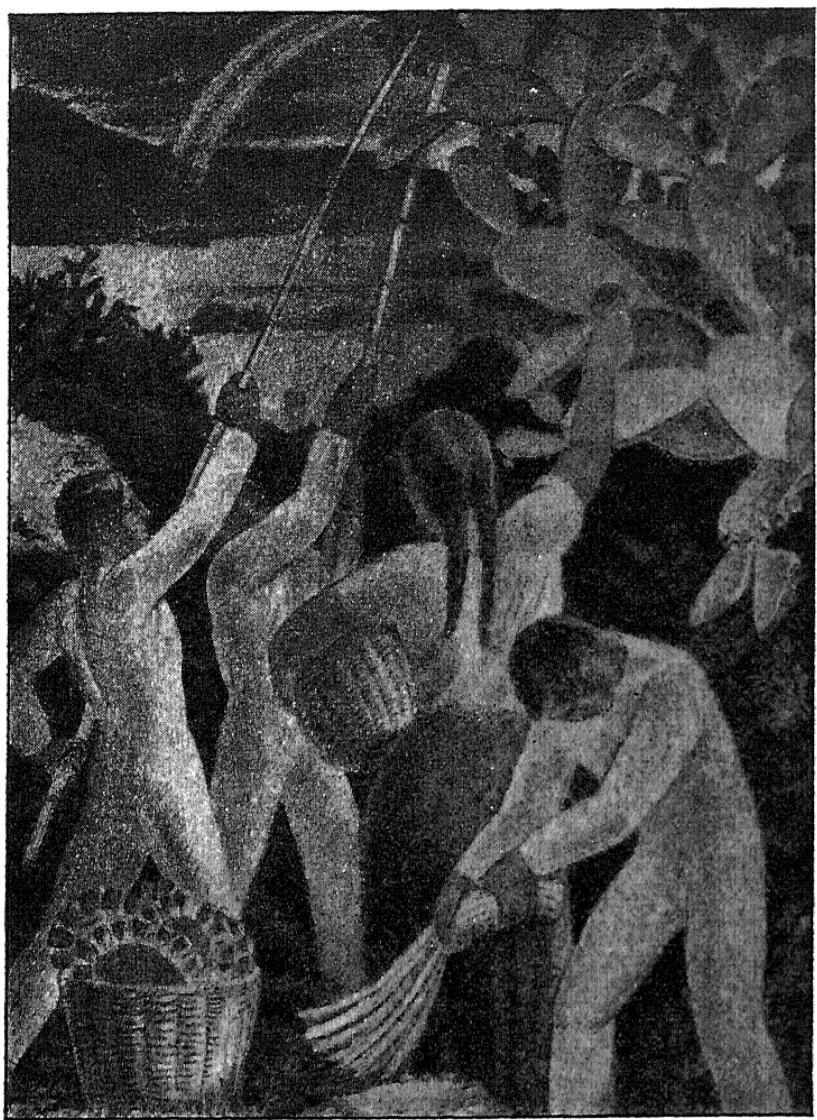




# THE WEDGE







"DESIDERIO AND HIS BROTHERS BUSTLED ABOUT WITH THEIR CANE-POLES AS THE GIRLS POINTED OUT THEIR RESPECTIVE SELECTIONS"

# THE WEDGE

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A Novel of Mexico

By HERMANN B. DEUTSCH

*With Illustrations by*  
ENRIQUE ALFÉREZ



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To the  
ENCHANTING  
MYTH OF IMAS



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE writer of this volume feels that no words of his could adequately satisfy the debt he owes to the many who have rendered assistance in the preparation of the following pages. That this help was in many instances received without even the giver's knowledge does not affect the binding nature of the debt.

For instance, no one who has devoted any study to the period of the Mexican Revolution can have failed to be influenced by such writings as Dr. Mariano Azuela's "Los de Abajo"; the late President Obregón's "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en la Campaña"; Edgcumb Pinchon's "Viva Villa"; Martín Luis Guzmán's "El Aguila y la Serpiente"; and others. In addition, there was placed at my disposal the manuscript of a hitherto unpublished biography of Alvaro Obregón, written by Armando Amador, now Consul-General of Mexico in Yokohama, himself an eye-witness to many of the stirring scenes that went to make up the vivid picture of the Revolution.

It is only proper that Enrique Alférez should be accorded front rank among those who rendered first aid in their own proper persons. His are the illustrations which appear in this volume. Reminiscences of his service in various revolutionary armies first suggested the fashioning of a novel based upon them. It is no more than fair to acknowledge him as a collaborator.

#### A C K N O W L E D G M E N T

The good will of Dr. Frans Blom, head of the department of Middle American Research of Tulane University, in placing a treasure of rare sources at my disposal; the courtesy of Dr. Rafael Heliodoro Valle, one of the editors of *El Excelsior* of Mexico City, in giving me the benefit of his cooperation; the patience of Don Higgins in assisting with the preparation of the manuscript; and last but by no means least, the long nights when Enrique Alférez, Xavier González and myself strayed far afield in endless discussions of folk songs, illustrations and what-not—how can the measure of these be expressed by words?

To all who, wittingly or unwittingly, contributed to the volume that is here laid before the reader I therefore tender this simple but sincere word of thanks.

HERMANN B. DEUTSCH

*New Orleans, La.*

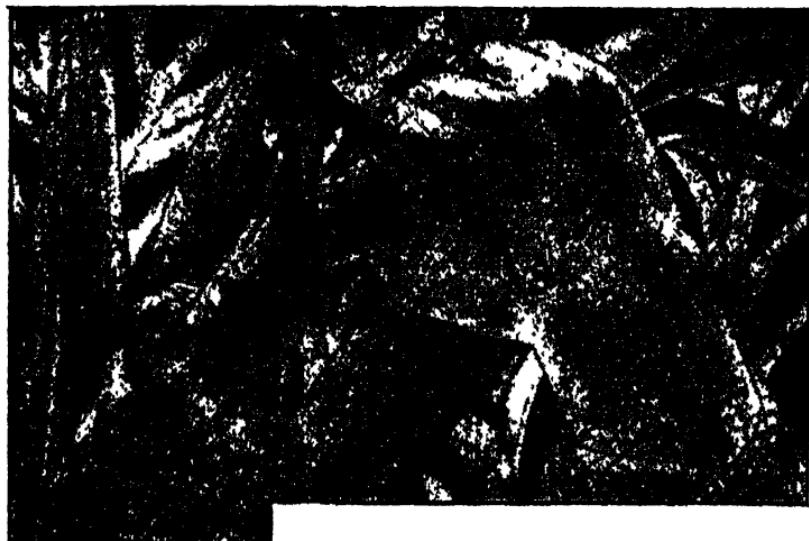
*March, 1935*

*All the characters who appear in this volume are  
fictional, and any resemblance to real persons, living  
or dead, is solely accidental.*



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ESIDERIO EYED THE BLACK mare hopefully as she shambled over scrubby pasturage toward the family cornfield he guarded that drowsy, endless afternoon. Any animal caught in the act of invading the crops could be taken back to the village, there to be held until its owner paid for whatever mischief had been wrought. The prospect of a cavalier's ride home at nightfall was undeniably one of charm; particularly on such a day as this when other boys, whose companionship usually helped to while away the hours, were absent on occasions of their own.

This guardianship of the crops was, all things considered, a highly desirable portfolio for seven-years-old. Desiderio had inherited it from his brother Jacinto, who in turn had succeeded Epitacio, oldest of the sons of Don Jaime Triano, the sculptor. And he bore himself proudly, too, for the appointment signalized his emancipation from babyhood. No longer would his laughing, bearded father pick him up

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and, tweaking each of the brown toes of a dimpled foot in turn, solemnly recite:

This little bandit stole an egg,  
This little bandit cooked it,  
This little bandit peeled it,  
This little bandit put salt on it,  
And . . .  
This little bandit—ate it all!

Now that the fields were entrusted to his care each afternoon, he was a responsible member of the household. Moreover, boys from nearby *barbechos* nearly always joined him at some central point for play. Sliding-pans, for example, were readily fashioned from the foliage of the maguey cactus. Seated on the broad base of a fleshy leaf whose point was brought forward between the legs like a saddle-horn, the youngsters could shoot down the glassy clay bank of a dry arroyo at a speed that would have threatened the integrity of anything less resilient than their springy young bones.

And there was always the chance that El Juipi, the wizened old shepherd, would pass at dusk, on his return from whichever end of the earth he had visited in grazing his flocks that day, and would tell the youngsters about one of the strange places where the world fell away to nothingness. Surfeited by play, the boys would stretch out beneath a shelter of poles, thatched with pampas straw, to await the coming of El Juipi, each lad with a handful of the shining *patoles* of which the old shepherd was inordinately fond; though it must be confessed he esteemed them for their edibility rather than for their beauty. *Patoles* are a special kind of beans, vari-colored and polished, so that they have all the seeming of jewels, and are therefore

infinitely more to be desired by youth than the black or bay beans of daily consumption.

Each evening, thus equipped, the boys watched the sun slide down the taut blue western sky, and disappear. A vague luminosity lingered on, as though day were loth to leave so pleasant an abiding-place, and sought to defer an enforced farewell. Against the waning radiance El Juipi would come into view, a bobbing silhouette above the sharply etched skyline of a long ridge. Sometimes one could see the lashing jerk of his arms as he threw stones to guide his sheep into the long and straggling file his remarkable dogs would maintain until the stone barriers of the home corral were reached.

"Juipi, Juipi!" the boys clamored as the shepherd drew rein before their lean-to. "Where have you been today?"

"To the south. To the end of the world at the south, *jijitos míos*."

"And what did you do there?"

"I went to the place where the sky comes down and touches the earth. I had never been there before. It is blue and very smooth and shiny."

"Do you mean that you touched it? Truly? Could you get as close to it as that?"

"Truly indeed! That is what I went there for, to touch it. I had seen the sky all my life, and sometimes from quite close, but never before had I touched it."

"Tell us what it felt like, Juipi."

"Tight; very, very tight. You have seen the big steer-hides which the weavers spread on poles so that they can beat the washed wool with sticks to make it fluffy? You know how tightly those hides are stretched and how smooth they feel when you touch them? That is how the sky felt,

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like a big steer-hide, very blue and smooth and bright and shiny."

By this time the sheep and the dogs would have straggled on. El Juipi looked at the boys expectantly. Each of them came forward and deposited a handful of *patoles* in the shepherd's worn leather pouch. Chatting among themselves of the wonders of the world's southern end, they trudged through the deep, soft dust of the roadway to their homes in the village.

It never occurred to any of them to doubt the authenticity of El Juipi's cartography. Indeed, Desiderio's reaction, on such occasions, was one of frank envy. He was quite determined as to his own future. He would be a shepherd and visit the ends of the earth himself. Hai! New places to see! A new place every day!

But on this particular afternoon, Desiderio's vigil had been solitary. The approach of the black mare at the awkward gait hobbled horses are constrained to use was the first break in the afternoon's monotony. If only she would cross the narrow strip of ground which served alike as roadway and as dividing line between pasture and field!

He thought: Perhaps, if I cast off her hobbles, she will come this way . . . but suppose she runs off in the other direction? I could never catch her, and besides, there would be nothing to show she had damaged the crops, though . . . now I wonder if it might not be possible to . . .

Tentatively he broke off a few of the cornstalks by way of supplying circumstantial evidence that the mare had invaded forbidden territory. But the effect struck him at once as blatantly counterfeit. Any one could tell that this was no equine sabotage. Then he picked up two stones and pounded off a shoot of young corn between them. That

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was better; infinitely better. Eager with the thrill of obstacles successfully surmounted, he wandered up and down the rows, beating the tips from green stalks between clashing stones.

He had to bury the amputated evidence, of course, and that was a long task and a hard one. The sun had dropped below the serrate horizon, and the stone quarry at the foot of Cerro de la Plata was a deep pool of green-blue twilight by the time he captured the mare and, loosing the hobbles, scrambled to her broad back. All in all, the comfortable jog homeward was rather more than grateful.

But his father stormed at him in a fine fury when it turned out that the mare belonged to one of his close friends, Don Eusebio Guzmán.

"The idea of claiming damages from one who is an honored guest at this house, you—you merchant! Ride the mare back to the pasture this instant, hobble her, leave her, and walk back. If there's no supper left when you return, well and good. May misfortune teach you manners. I shall not let you use any carving tools for a week, do you hear?"

Desiderio's mother, Doña Josefa, was genuinely distressed when the boy finally made his way back to the house, too weary to eat the food she had set aside for him. Yet the thorn that pricked him most gallingly was not the thought of all the needless labor he had apparently gone to such pains to bring upon himself, but the realization that his artistry had been wasted. Don Jaime would not even trouble to investigate what had happened at the field. The horse of a friend was evidently immune to the operation of laws which governed the commonalty of the animal kingdom.

Chafing under the sting of his discomfiture, Desiderio was reminded of his Aunt Dominga. He began, for the first

time, to understand her attitude toward those about her. Tall, bony, self-conscious, and a confirmed hypochondriac, Tía Dominga gave one the impression that she was convinced the universe was in league expressly to plague her; that unmerited misfortune must harry her all the days of her life.

Like all the village womenfolk, who wanted the world to know they had no desire to conceal their movements, she wore proudly squeaking shoes. But she walked with such short, heel-clicking steps, that the very squeak of her footgear had a distinct and recognizable individuality. It was as though even her shoes expressed resentment over a slight soon to be put upon them.

"And how goes it with you, Doña Dominga?" she would be asked.

Politeness required that she reply:

"Well, thanks. And you?"

But Doña Dominga always frowned, pursed her already puckered lips more firmly still, and indignantly shrugged a sharp shoulder whose angularity was painfully apparent even under the folds of her shawl.

"I am navigating along with life until death shall have come," she invariably answered, with an air which implied that she was already resigned to the worst.

Desiderio had heard her say it often; hundreds of times, so constantly was the phrase on her tongue. "*Estoy navegando con la vida hasta que la muerte llegue!*" He wondered why any one should say that sort of thing. But on the night when he dragged his sore feet and sorcer spirit back to the parental threshold, too tired to evince the faintest quickening of interest in the supper plate his mother brought him, he began to understand that there

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were occasions when life might well appear to be a barren mockery and quite empty.

Apprehensive because of his failure to respond to the prospect of food, a reaction he had hitherto manifested only under the enervating influence of illness, his mother hurried him to bed.

"How does my littlest one feel?" she inquired solicitously after she had bathed his aching feet and tucked him in.

He did his manful best to purse his lips, though the resultant pout fell far short of the effect he had thought to achieve.

"I am navigating along with life until death shall have come," he replied gloomily, in the very intonation of his Tía Dominga; resigned, but expecting the worst.

To her eternal credit be it recorded that Doña Josefa did not smile.

"*Sueña con los angelitos, bombrecito mío,*" she murmured and kissed him goodnight. "Dream with the little angels, my manling."





HERE HAD BEEN A DRIVING rain, but now all the world was clean and new, for the *culebra* had been cut betimes.

*Culebra* means "snake." Here and there about the mountain regions, the formation of the towering hill barriers is such that under certain conditions the moisture-laden winds are funneled into a peculiar vortex. That is how the *culebra* is born as a serpentine black cloud. Usually the prayers of the devout suffice to dispel it as a brisk shower. But at other times the *culebra* becomes a cloudburst. Since the little villages are all nestled in the valleys which furrow the sierras, this is an affliction of the worst sort, for houses, trees, and whole fields may be washed away in the torrential rush of waters.

As soon as the beginnings of the inky serpent become visible in the heavens, the priest or the sacristan, or whoever first sees the danger, sounds an alarm on the church bell, and this for two reasons. Primarily the visitation is meted out to punish a village for its wickedness, and there-

fore all the inhabitants must seek refuge in prayer, or, at the very least, confess their sins and announce repentance. On the more practical side, the church roof is invariably the highest point of vantage in the village, and thus affords material as well as spiritual sanctuary.

There are two ways to scotch the snake of the skies before it has attained the full measure of its virulence. One is with the tresses of a virgin, who must, of course, be old enough for maturity to endow her virtuous estate with an adequate degree of validity. The other is with the sandals of any boy named Juan. It is always safest to have both these strings to one's bow, for sometimes, when a girl whose chastity has been taken for granted is summoned to help cut the *culebra*, it is discovered that she has tactfully gone into retirement in some other part of the house. In that event it becomes imperative to find a boy named Juan. Fortunately there are few Mexican families without one.

On this particular July afternoon the *culebra* had shown its head, black and forbidding, above the crest of Cerro de la Plata, and had swiftly flung its ominous coil full across the zenith. The jangle of bronze bells sent a dissonant tocsin through all the valley. In the dwelling of Don Jaime this evoked an instant frenzy of alarm, for Doña Josefa was well aware that it could betoken only the approach of disaster. Her shrill outcry summoned the entire household.

"Jacinto mine!" she clamored frantically. "Hurry, baby. Hurry, hurry! Run to the house of Doña Carmela, and ask her for the love of God to lend us the sandals of her Juanito. Make haste, baby, make all haste! Tell her I ask that inasmuch as they have the tresses of their Magdalena, will she not lend us her little Juan's sandals."

"What nonsense!" grumbled Don Jaime as he turned irritably back to his studio. "Disturbing the whole house, frightening the children, when you'd much better be attending to your kitchen, so that we'll not have to wait for supper. *Qué culebra ni qué nada!* Who cares about *culebras*, anyway?"

Doña Josefa paid no attention. She knew, of course, that her husband was a casual agnostic. A sculptor who makes the saints that perform the miracles can hardly be expected to have complete faith in any mystic ritual. Besides, is it not always said that in the house of the blacksmith the fire is stirred with a wooden poker?

So without pausing for vain protests against her husband's impiety at a time when Heaven was plainly calling all mankind to an accounting, she bustled to the room where she stored holy palm fronds from each Palm Sunday for just such emergencies as this. One of them she kindled at the fire on her cookstove, tucking a bundle of others under her left arm. Thus fortified, she hastened back to the gate between the patio and the garden, where she was met by Jacinto, breathless from his run through the orchard.

"Mama," he reported, "Doña Carmela says she can let you have only one of Juan's sandals. They are using the other one themselves."

"Hmmm!" Doña Josefa's lips were compressed knowingly. So Carmela was no longer using her young daughter's tresses to cut the *culebra*? Magdalena indeed! "Hmmm!" Nice goings on! Small wonder the village was threatened with extinction! And only one sandal to ward off the peril! Well, one must do the best one could.

"Xochitl, little angel, come to me," Doña Josefa said to her ten-year-old daughter, handing her the sandal of Juan. "Hold this in your right hand."

Primly, yet with that in her bearing which betokened a thorough consciousness of the exalted position to which she had been elevated, Xochitl held the worn sandal before her, edgewise, as though the sole were indeed a knife-blade.

"Jesus Christ, temper your wrath, your justice and your severity," Doña Josefa began raptly.

Closing her plump hand about Xochitl's soft little paw, they made the sign of the cross with the cutting edge of the sandal. The prayer ran on and on, with a sign of the cross to punctuate its every period. Doña Josefa paused only to toss another dried palm-leaf, now and then, upon the dying embers of its predecessors, to keep alight the hallowed fire.

Frequently repeated was the versified prayer to Santa Bárbara, which runs:

*Santa Bárbara bendita  
Que en el cielo estás escrita  
Con papel y agua bendita,  
Y al pie de la cruz  
La tormenta quitas tú.\**

Desiderio was torn between two conflicting urges. Very much he wanted to show, by going indoors to the studio, that, like his father, he was unafraid. At the same time, he did not want to miss any excitement that might be in prospect. Ever since he could remember, measures for cutting the *culebra* had invariably proved effective. None the less, there was always the chance that the charm might

\* "Blessed Saint Barbara, who art recorded in heaven on paper with holy water, at the foot of the cross thou stoppest the tempest."—Saint Barbara was a virgin martyr, who was convicted of practising Christianity and was ordered beheaded. The dread sentence was carried out by her father, who was killed by a lightning flash during a storm on his way home from the execution. For this reason prayers to Saint Barbara are considered exceptionally effective as concerns anything connected with storms or tempests.

fail. That would be something worth experiencing—a sojourn on the flat roof of the house, watching a tree swirl by with chickens ensconced in its branches, as in the time of the big flood about which his grandfather told him.

While his mother continued to pray, he checked over the catalogue of his own more recent transgressions, on the chance that any of them might have been sufficiently serious to tempt God to wipe out the village. Just the other day, for example, during Don Jaime's absence, he had lawlessly used some of his father's carving tools; the good tools, not the old ones which the sculptor had set aside especially for the use of his sons. But then, he had taken them to work on the head of a San Antonio, and while it hadn't turned out to be much of a San Antonio, it seemed hardly reasonable that so much celestial wrath should be evoked by anything done in the furtherance of so godly an enterprise. Perhaps if he could commit a very great sin at once . . .

Rather cautiously he tried the experiment of saying to himself: "I do not repent! No, indeed, I do not repent!" But he did not carry this too far. He had no desire to tempt Providence into making the issue a personal one, and perhaps singling out him alone for retribution.

Even as he wondered what else he might do to bring about an interestingly general disaster, the *culebra* lost shape and spread over the skies as an ordinary cloud pall; big raindrops plashed down upon the flags of the patio, widely scattered at first, but increasing swiftly in numbers and frequency. It was plain to the dullest eye that all danger was past. Here and there the cloud frayed completely away, and showed ragged patches of blue sky.

"God be thanked! God be praised!" rejoiced Doña Josefa as she hurried the youngsters indoors, taking with her the precious sandal and the surplus palm fronds.

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"Are we going to kill the pig, mama?" inquired Desiderio artlessly. "I think perhaps Tía Lola would enjoy eating pig tongue."

Underlying this apparently selfless suggestion was the thought that, after all, if the *culebra* returned the next day, and efforts to cut it failed, the pig would be washed away, and everything would be wasted; whereas, if it were butchered and eaten at once, the pig would have been enjoyed, no matter what ensued on the morrow. Usually there is a feast in every household whenever the *culebra* has been cut.

At Desiderio's suggestion, Doña Josefa brightened visibly.

"I think yes, we will kill the pig," she beamed, for it made her very happy that calamity had once more been averted from the home.

A delighted chorus followed her decision.

"But who's to run for Miguel?" asked Doña Josefa doubtfully. "It is raining so hard, perhaps we had better wait a bit."

"No, I'll run fetch him". . ."Let me do it, I can go much faster". . ."I can run fastest, and besides, I'm the oldest one, it belongs to me to go for Miguel," the boys clamored all together so that their mother held her hands to her ears and Xochitl arched her dark eyebrows—a facial expression she had just learned to employ. She thought it gave her quite a sniffy look of grown-up superiority, such as a young lady might well use to imply that, after all, dreadful as such goings-on were, what could one expect of boys?

Miguel was the village pig-sticker. What made him so fascinating was his knife, whose blade had been worn and whetted to rapier slenderness. On this occasion, however, he found no gallery of spectators to admire his deft crafts-

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manship, for, the moment the rain had passed, girls from every part of the village flocked to Doña Josefa's garden to claim their *coronas*.

A *corona* is the flat leaf of a nopal cactus which has a perfect and unbroken ring of prickly pears along its edge. The pears themselves are greatly esteemed as a delicacy, but no one would dream of eating one from a *corona*, which is always dedicated to the shrine of a favorite saint as an offering of perfection. Besides, there are enough leaves on which the pears are irregularly set to supply all those who care to eat. The nopal cactus in Doña Josefa's garden was a good thirty feet tall, and covered as much ground as a modest cottage.

Each spring, when the cactus first set the small buds of its pears, the girls and the matrons of the village dropped in of an afternoon to pay courtesy calls on Doña Josefa. Each would bear a sprig of geranium, or a potted carnation, or something of the sort as a gift to the hostess.

"Now you are my little geranium," they would say ceremoniously in making the presentation. Or, as the case might be, "my little carnation," or "my little rose." After that, each would select a budding *corona* for her very own.

Throughout the ensuing weeks they made little visits to the house, or perhaps they only stopped for a moment outside the low coping of the garden wall.

"My little carnation," they greeted Doña Josefa, "how goes it with my *corona*?"

"It goes well," was the reply. "The pears are still green, but they will ripen fast now."

Later in the season it would be:

"Your *corona* is perfect, little angel, and the *tunas* are ripe. As soon as there has been a hard rain to wash off the spines, you must come get it for your shrine."

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The boys—all but El Joto Chago \*—had only one concern with this interchange of flowers, and that was at the time the *coronas* were gathered. Armed with cane-poles across the tips of which nails had been driven, it was their task to twitch down the *coronas* from their spiny fastnesses, and deliver them to the girls who had marked them at the beginning of the season. For the rest, they regarded it all as a womanish business; something as definitely effeminate as embroidery or dolls.

El Joto Chago was different. He did not play much with the other boys, whose robust language, when they were out of earshot of their elders, shocked him deeply. He never used any of the obscenities which boys the world over seem to pick up by first intention. There was a sort of caroling lilt to El Joto's speech, and sometimes he walked with such mincing little steps that the other boys snickered slyly among themselves.

His mother adored him, and had dedicated him in infancy to the priesthood, so that he would soon enter the seminary to pursue the studies for his ordination. Indeed, most of the older women were very fond of El Joto Chago, and occasionally—but not very often—one or another of them would sigh and express the wish that the lads of her own rowdy brood might be more like him.

He was the only boy in the village to claim a *corona* from Doña Josefa, whom he called his *geranito*, for the foot-long geranium cutting he had brought her that spring was now in bloom. All the women thought it very sweet of him to maintain a shrine thus early in life.

Once the rain that came with this day's *culebra* had passed, the claimants of *coronas* hurried eagerly to the gathering, impatient of delay. Not only had the driving

\* *El joto* means "the sissy," and Chago is to Santiago as Jim is to James.

shower washed the thick leaves quite smooth and clean, but the successful scotching of the sky-serpent gave real point to an offering of thanks to all the saints who had helped protect the community.

Desiderio and his brothers, bustling about with their cane-poles, were swollen with pride and importance as the girls of the village pointed out their respective selections, while, knuckles resting on ample hips, the older women stood about, watching the fun and exchanging the gossip of the day. The lively chatter that filled Doña Josefa's garden was broken by the lilting voice of El Joto Chago, who called to the hostess from beyond the low garden wall.

"*Mi geranito*," he fluted, "I have come for my *corona* too."

Tall, graceful and pretty, he stood there a moment, quite pleasantly conscious of the fact that all eyes were fixed upon him. Luckily he could not hear the low-voiced comments of the three brothers, who took advantage of the situation to relieve their minds as to El Joto.

"*Mi geranito*, indeed!" mimicked Epitacio in a barely audible falsetto. His voice had already changed, and he could thus achieve an effect still denied to his brothers. "Imagine it! *Mi cabroncito* would be more like it."

Desiderio spluttered with merriment. Then he suggested a name on his own account, improvising the diminutive out of a newly acquired word which went Epitacio several degrees better. He was rather grateful to El Joto for having given him an opportunity to air his wit. Taking it by and large, what with the excitement about the *culebra*, the arrival of Miguel, the gathering of the *coronas*, and the prospect of a feast of roast pig that night, it had been a pretty good day.





OR MORE THAN A YEAR, NOW, Desiderio had been given the run of Don Jaime's studio. When he first asked permission to share this privilege with Epitacio, his father was pleased. As long as he did not get directly under foot or spill any of the scarlet paint (rural communities always insisted on a great deal of blood when ordering a crucifix), Desiderio could do just about what he wished.

Epitacio was a skilful though unimaginative wood carver already, and would soon be making pierced hands, applying first coats of paint, and in general relieving his father of lesser detail work. Jacinto, on the other hand, had never sought any part in the business of the studio. He spent all his free time at the house of Don Eusebio Guzmán, where the blanket weavers were, watching the beating and carding and spinning, and coming home splashed with brilliant dyestuffs from head to foot.

Desiderio had puttered about the studio ever since he was eight years old. Oddly enough he did not try to plunge headlong into the carving of saintly statues or other

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figures. He seemed to find a curious pleasure and contentment in working out abstract designs—perhaps a panel of conventionalized cornstalks, awkwardly done, but with a recognizable rhythm of movement in the pattern; a miniature of cactus leaves in ebony out of which he made for his mother a stickily elaborate set of earrings at the sight of which his father grunted scornfully.

Now, however, after more than a year of seeking to satisfy in sheer design a vague craving for something still too indefinite to be recognized even by himself, he suddenly conceived a notion for what was to be a *magnum opus*—a San Miguel. As sculptured by his father, St. Michael's coat of lizard mail had always fascinated the boy. Yet the statue as he planned it was to be quite the conventional one, an armor-clad figure with upraised sword and scales of justice, holding one foot on the breast of a vanquished and prostrate Satan.

His father chuckled, but unhesitatingly supplied a block of willow wood, and now Desiderio, who kept his statue jealously cloaked when he was not at work, was ready to begin on the detail of the armor. He would work all the morning, and all the afternoon, and . . .

There was a great hallooing from the patio.

"Hai! Don Jaime!" cried deep voices.

Desiderio's father rushed to the door and spread his arms.

"Fortunate are the eyes that behold you here!" he greeted the visitors.

"Happy to see you, *maestro!*" they replied.

"Come in. You are in your house." There was nothing stilted in the sculptor's use of the words which epitomize the hospitality of all Mexico. "You are in your house."

Desiderio knew all three of them for his father's special cronies. There was the little, dried-up Protestant minister,

whose shabby church housed all the non-Catholic worshippers in the village, Señor Don Tomás Canales, clad in his unvarying suit of worn and sober black, with greenish highlights over the seams, carrying a slender cane with which, as he sat in the studio, he traced over and over again on the packed earthen floor the outline of a little church. There was the portly attorney, Señor Licenciado Don Jorge Ramírez, very much the *catrín*,\* wearing sharply pointed button-shoes, a stiff collar and a white vest with his tailored suit of black broadcloth.

And finally there was the gorgeous figure of Señor Don Fidel Zataráin, the ranchman, his legs encased in dove-colored and skin-tight breeches of buckskin, kept taut by straps beneath the insteps of astonishingly small and high-heeled shoes. He wore, too, a spotless smock of sheer white linen, the tails of which were knotted tightly at the waist to cover a cartridge belt snugly fitted to lean hips; and across the back of the smock a soaring eagle had been embroidered in colored silk. An arresting figure of a man was Don Fidel, with his huge, curling mustaches; though these were no whit more impressive than the enormous gold watch he consulted frequently, or the great golden chain with which he hauled it into view.

As each of the callers entered, Don Jaime embraced him twice—once over the right shoulder and once over the left—following this with a restrained and formal hand-clasp.

"And what brings you to the village?" he asked Don Fidel. "It has made more than two months since we saw you. I hope the dam did not burst."

\* *Catrín* is the antonym—whatever it may be—of "huck." Town Mouse, perhaps; or what fishing guides mean when they refer to a "sport"; or, better still, what the outraged father in one of the no-mother-to-guide-her melodramas used to call a "city feller."

"I should think not," the *bacendado* replied, smiling broadly. "That San Isidro you made for us protected us very well indeed."

San Isidro is the patron saint of all farmers, just as San Antonio is the patron of lovers.

"I suppose His Holiness blessed him, so that he could not fail to keep a dam from bursting," remarked Señor Canales acidly.

"Now, don't be acting like a rutting bull," warned Don Fidel. Even the little minister joined in the laugh which greeted this sally, for if there was anything in all the wide world which the spinsterish figure of Don Tomás did not suggest, it was a bull. "What is pricking you anyway, Señor Ministro? For myself I don't worry about any San Isidro, but my cattlemen and my laborers and all my field hands demand a chapel and a saint. After all, why not? So as long as I am getting them a saint, I come to our *maestro* here for it. Does it irk you that he made us a good one?"

"Come, come! Let us not quarrel so soon. First of all, will you not share a *copita* with me?" inquired Don Jaime.

"With all pleasure," the rancher and the attorney replied together. But Señor Canales shook his head and said severely: "Thank you, no."

"Ah, you are like San Gaspar," charged the sculptor, his voice heavy with mock scorn.

"And how is San Gaspar?"

"Stingy, of course. A *cabrón*\* with his miracles."

\* *Cabrón* may as well be explained, since there is really no English equivalent for it. Literally, it has two meanings. One is "he-goat"; the other, "one who consents to the commission of adultery by his wife; a cuckold." More generally, one who traffics in the chastity of women. It is perhaps the commonest of all obscene epithets among Spanish-speaking peoples; but it must be borne in mind that when thus employed it becomes merely an epithet and nothing more. It is not then to be taken literally, in other words, any more than the free use of the

"Well then, rather than have you compare me to one of your idolatrous saints, I will have a drink too."

"Good!"

Don Jaime sent Desiderio for a jug of cold water while he rummaged about the shelves which lined the studio until he found a bottle of absinthe next to a small grouping of the Holy Family. While the three men dripped the *copitas* which turned their goblets into cloudy jade, Don Jaime went to a drawer in a carpenter's bench, yanked it open, and took out a flitch of sun-cured horse meat. With his strong fingers he tore off a number of shreds, heaped them on a platter he found to hand, poured cognac over it all, and lighted the liquor, letting the blue flames dance until the dry meat had just barely begun to scorch at the edges. Then he extinguished the fire and set the dish within reach of his guests with a cordial "*Tomen un taco!*" so that each could help himself when he chose.

"And what's been going on?" the sculptor asked.

"I have just returned from the county seat," Señor Ramírez replied, "where I tried to save this poor devil of a peon, Heraclio."

"That was the man who stole the corn, wasn't it?" asked Señor Canales.

"Stole nothing, Señor Ministro. It was all a plot against him. It is true, yes, that two sacks of corn were found hidden under his bed. But he had not put them there. It was his mayordomo who had done that." He turned to Don Fidel Zataráin with a wicked chuckle. "A member of your lodge," he added.

appellation "bastard" among those who speak English in the heartier manner carries with it the least implication of factual illegitimacy. In a still more widely generalized sense, *cabrón* had come to be applied to anything regarded as deserving of opprobrium. That is what Don Jaime meant when he spoke of St. Jasper, who is reputed to be very niggardly in the matter of miracles, as "*cabrón con sus misagros*."

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The ranchman bridled, twisting his mustaches.

"That is not a pretty jest," he retorted. "You know very well that the landowners are not all alike. There are some of us, at least, who are still *gente*."

"It was no more than a jest, my friend. Truly, I know you pay your laborers justly and do not keep them in false debt so that they are no more than bond-slaves. But this mayordomo I am talking about, he was the other sort. He wanted Heraclio's daughter, but he knew that if he touched the girl, Heraclio, who is of unbelievable strength, would have torn him apart, guards or no guards." He grinned once more at Don Fidel, and observed parenthetically: "Of course, we know how these landowners are about the girls on their ranches."

"If that's to my address, it is misdirected," Don Fidel assured him with a satisfied smile. "Every one knows that when I seek amusement I prefer silk underwear to bare flesh—and besides, there is a certain something about these town *güilas* who have been trained by lawyer patrons, that . . ."

Desiderio did not understand why all of them except Señor Ramírez should laugh so loudly. He hoped they would tell more about Heraclio, and as though in response to this unspoken wish, the attorney rather hastily resumed the tale.

"Anyway, it did this mayordomo 'no good to get the girl's father out of the way. He had the corn put under Heraclio's bed while the man was out in the field, and that night he organized a search of all the huts, and of course the corn was found right there. He arrested Heraclio himself on the spot, but the daughter had already slipped out and she ran all the way to town and told me what had happened. You see, Heraclio had heard of me because I

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had once been of some service to his kinsmen, the four brothers González who live here in the village."

"Yes, yes, I know them. They are good boys, and have supported their mother, Doña Mónica, ever since her husband disappeared," said Don Jaime.

"That was Don Tereso, wasn't it?" asked the minister.

"Precisely. A man who was very bitter against the land-grabbers. I once warned him to keep a closer halter on his tongue in public, but he was outspoken. It was later reported he must have fallen from a cliff while on the range with his sheep, but the body was never found. Naturally, we all have our own ideas of what took place."

"I know," agreed the attorney, nodding vigorously and taking a strip of the brandied meat. "And his sons, especially that oldest one, they are all cast in the same mold."

"You were telling us about Heraclio," Don Fidel reminded him.

"Truly, yes. What I started to say was that through this service I had rendered his kinsmen in the matter of a claim for a shipment of blankets to Durango, Heraclio knew of me. He had once told his daughter that if ever anything should happen to him, she was to look me up immediately. I have done what I could, but when the case came up at the county seat . . . well, after all, what can a landless laborer expect in times like these? The judge is not going to offend the mayordomo, for the big landowners are the only ones who pay taxes . . . naturally, they bleed them out of their laborers first . . . and the rich have the ear of the authorities in the matter of appointments . . ."

"Have they sentenced him yet?"

"Heraclio? Of course. To the *cuerda*."

Don Jaime clicked his tongue commiseratingly. Even Desiderio knew about the *cuerda*, for there was always much

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talk about these regiments of the doomed, who were sent against the Yaquis, and whose recruits never survived a first enlistment.

"An infamy!" exclaimed Don Fidel. "They go too far, these people who fawn on Díaz and tell him he is the savior of Mexico."

"Ah, what can be expected of a country that is so wholly priest-ridden as ours?" snapped Señor Canales, as though the words were part of something brittle and he were breaking them off, one by one.

"With permission, Señor Ministro," interrupted Don Jaime. "If you are talking about my images again, they give to many people who are steeped in misery the only touch of what they regard as beauty . . . and that is more than your church offers them."

"Yes, until the big change comes . . . and all of you know the change I mean. It is in the air," observed the attorney. "Will it be in our time? Perhaps not, for our disinherited ones may be too far sunk in the stupor of peonage. Poor devils! When Díaz decreed that the communal lands of the villages must be divided among all the inhabitants, some of them would trade their holdings for a bottle of tequila or a couple of yards of calico. Land-titles meant nothing to them. They supposed that as long as the land was there it could be tilled. And those were the sales that Díaz validated by his damned decrees! Now the big *hacendados* who own those lands today rob the laborers through their cheating mayordomos and their peonage systems of debt until they have scarcely a handful of corn to eat . . . and they look to wooden saints painted in bright colors . . . and do nothing!"

"Perhaps we might have the *maestro* carve us a great many devils instead of his everlasting saints," grinned Don

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Fidel. "They could attend to Díaz and all his kind, and save us a lot of trouble."

"Have any of you," interrupted Don Jorge abruptly, "heard of this new book by a Don Francisco Madero? I am told the government has suppressed it. That is the terrible part of living way off in the country here. The first we learn of a book like that is the rumor that it has been suppressed."

"What is the book about?"

"God alone knows," replied the attorney with a shrug. "I have heard that it deals with the presidential succession, the election that is to come in 1910."

"Why do we not forget these afflictions, we who see one another only at such lamentably long intervals?" demanded the ranchman, rising and tugging out his huge watch. "Here it's past ten o'clock, and instead of celebrating the fact that we are all together, we talk about the miseries of other people. Let's go down to El Baluarte and see whether they have any more of that fine Galician wine."

They went arm in arm, still talking loudly as they strode along the dusty roadway. Don Jaime had not even doffed the grocer's apron he habitually wore while at his work.





EVERY ONE KNEW WHAT HAD happened the moment messengers from the plaza began to arrive, because whenever Don Jaime took the first glass too much he would purchase gifts for his family. He sent these out to the house, one at a time, by courier, and though they pleased the children enormously, Doña Josefa always looked at them askance. Not that she ever dreamed of upbraiding Don Jaime for these occasional mild debauches. She realized by this time that under the spell of convivial company her husband would embark upon a moderate carouse. But she was not pleased. The children could sense that.

On each such occasion, the first present to reach the house would be a fine new chamber-pot of glazed red earthenware, brilliantly painted with white and blue flowers, and filled to the brim with candies: luridly striped peppermint sticks, pralines of crystallized sugar and the roasted meats of pumpkin seeds, candied cactus pith, and braided ropes of molasses taffy.

If, after Don Jaime went to the plaza of a morning, a

candy-laden chamber-pot was brought to the house during the course of the forenoon, Doña Josefa knew she might as well not delay lunch by waiting for her husband. So at mid-day she called the children to the kitchen, fed them, and told them to remain indoors. The same thing was done at nightfall, though by then Don Jaime would have returned, going through the back garden direct to the studio, where his wife later brought him his supper.

There had been a time when Desiderio ran off to the village, at every opportunity, to see what his father was about on such excursions. The very mystery with which Doña Josefa sought to cloak her husband's doings plagued the boy into a restless desire to find out what was afoot.

However, it was not long before he lost interest in this game, for he discovered that Don Jaime's course never varied. First he would drink with his friends at the bar of the big general store, El Baluarte, leaving now and again to step into one of the mercantile departments to purchase gifts for his family. After a while he would depart and, genially beaming upon the world at large, wander about the streets, to be hailed everywhere as *el maistro santero*—Master Saintwright—by the villagers, who were very proud of him and paid no heed to the eccentricities of his garb and his behavior.

Sooner or later he would end his ramble at one of the two public washing-places where the women of the town did their laundering. These *lavaderos* were no more than wide, gravelly shallows in the creek which ran through the village. Just why Don Jaime should have wanted to hang about them, Desiderio could not imagine. Nodding a courteous acknowledgment of the shrill chorus of "*Buenas días, señor maistro santero!*" which greeted him, Don Jaime seemed merely to stare with intense interest at the shifting

movements of the women as they toiled over their tasks.

Evidently the high-pitched clack of gossip and the frequent bursts of shrill laughter annoyed the sculptor. Usually he left the *lavadero* after a few brief moments, and hurried to the market-place. When he returned, he bore a heaping basket of *duro y con sal*. Literally translated this means "hard and with salt." It is the name given to rendered pigskin, flensed in large sections from a newly killed hog, and converted into long sheets of crackling. Well salted, these are regarded by young and old as a prime delicacy.

Without further ado, Don Jaime handed each of the laundresses not merely the usual penny strip of this dainty, but a big square slice. After that there was no more shrill chatter or strident laughter; only a subdued smacking of many lips and the swish and slap of wet cloth. With no more harsh tonal distractions to vex him, Don Jaime would prop himself on his elbows as he reclined against the bank, and watch the shifting play of figures in the sunlight against the flash and chip of broken reflections in the water.

Already familiar with the routine of his father's bibulous excursions, Desiderio made no effort to steal away from home the day Don Jaime went marching off to El Baluarte with his three cronies; not even when, within the hour, a messenger arrived with a shining new chamber-pot heaped with an eclectic assortment of sweetmeats. With no more than a grudging pause at lunch time, he worked over his San Miguel. He was still in the studio when darkness began to close in. As daylight failed, he moved his little work-table ever closer to the patio door. He was almost at the threshold by the time Don Jaime, according to custom, came in quietly from the back garden.

"Still at it, little bat?" the sculptor asked. "You'll ruin

those eyes, Lello, if you don't take better care of them."

Desiderio looked up sheepishly.

"I was . . . I am so anxious to see what it is going to look like when it is finished," he confessed. "And it will be so long till tomorrow."

Don Jaime lighted a cigarette.

"There is always time enough, Lello. Let me see what you are doing there."

The sculptor smoked on in silence as he examined his small son's work.

"So! Hmm! I can tell by the scales of the armor that your hand is steady enough at least. But . . . oh, why don't you stop all this nonsense of art? It isn't worth it, Lello, unless you want to follow it as a hobby. Learn a good trade or study for a profession. Then you can do with your art what you please. If you have to depend on it for a living, you can only do what pleases others. You have to make a monkey out of yourself. Ha! look at me . . . and I studied in Rome and dreamed that some day . . . But what is it now? 'Put on lots of blood, *maistro*, then the image will make them realize their sins.' An artist . . . an artist whose art consists of putting lots of blood on religious images for peasant shrines . . . and who doesn't have to care what his work looks like, because those who see it will never know the difference . . . and because he is well paid, anyway."

He bent moodily to examine Saint Michael more closely, struck by something odd in the prostrate Satan's throat.

"What sort of thing is that?" he demanded. "Where did you ever see a man with a neck like that? Like a sick woman! Are you giving Satan a goiter?"

Desiderio squirmed in embarrassment.

"That is his sin," he blurted out at length.

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"What does that mean to say?"

"It is what the priest told us, papa. He said that when Adam ate the apple, a piece of it stuck in his throat and made it stick out, and that is why it is called the Adam's apple, because all men have that place sticking out where Adam swallowed the apple to remind them of their sin . . . and . . . and . . . he said if it had not been for Adam's sin we would not be born. Well, Satan is the worst sinner of all, isn't he? I wanted to give him a big sin, a much bigger sin than any one else has, and so I thought that if I made . . ."

Don Jaime regarded the boy with shining eyes.

"Not just the form," he whispered. "The reasons that underlie the form . . . and once I thought that I too might one day fashion a statue that men would pause to see."

He picked Desiderio up and held him close, something he had not done for years. Then he set the boy down and observed fondly:

"Some say he is made of sugar, some say he is made of porcelain, and some say he is made of ivory. You will be an artist, one of these days, Lello, and this is perhaps very, very unfortunate, but there's nothing we can do about it now, so henceforth you may use the good carving tools."

Desiderio almost burst with a new feeling, one he had never before experienced and could not now classify. He wanted to fling himself on his father and embrace him, but the big man pinched his cheek, very gently.

"You'd best go to the other side of the house, Little Sculptor," he advised. "If your mother finds you here she'll raise a din that will make your ears ring. And mine, too."

As Desiderio crossed the patio he felt that his head was among the stars. Once he half raised his hands to brush them aside.





EARS AGO EPITACIO HAD COME across a dead steer and had brought one of the long horns home to his mother.

She cleaned it carefully and put in a few pinches of earth. Into the soil she thrust a sprig of *juncos*, the cactus that looks like a strand of green-gray braided cord. From an iron spike driven into the adobe walls of the carriage entrance she suspended this hanging basket, so that it might also do service as a knocker. The taller of the two men who had just dismounted before the house recognized the horn for what it was, and struck it two resounding taps with the tightly woven butt of his quirt.

Desiderio's mother sent him to see who had come and what was wanted. He knew the callers at once, having seen the brothers González frequently at their sheep pens, and he wondered what they were doing in town at this hour of the day and this time of the year, the height of the shearing season.

"What may I offer you, señores?" he inquired politely.

"We have come to see Don Jaime," the taller one replied, awkwardly turning his broad hat about in his hands.

"He is in the studio. I go to call him."

Don Jaime was still brushing wood shavings from his apron when he came out.

"*Buenas tardes, maestro,*" they greeted him in unison.

"*Buenas tardes, Señores González.* How is it with you?"

The González brothers assured him it was well with them. Don Jaime inquired individually, and one at a time, after their mother, their brothers, their families and their flocks, in compliance with the customary ritual of etiquette.

"In what way may I be of service to you?" he then asked.

"We have come, *maestro*, to see you about getting a little saint for our mother as a birthday gift from her sons," replied Juan, the elder, who had evidently been chosen in advance as spokesman for the transaction.

"Good," the sculptor replied heartily. "Let us go into my workshop and sit down."

Desiderio followed them, for he could always find something with which to busy himself when there was a prospect of overhearing discussions from which the children of the house were ordinarily excluded.

"You will want a Santa Mónica, I suppose," Don Jaime observed. "Your mother's name is Mónica, isn't it? Let me see now, that would mean her birthday is on the fourth of May. About a month. Hmm! Well, yes, I can finish you a *santita* in that time."

"True indeed, it is for her birthday, *maestro*, and that falls on the fourth of May, but it is not a Santa Mónica we want. We want a Santa Teresa, because that is our mother's favorite saint. You see, Tereso was the name of our late father, may God be holding him in the hollow of His holy hand!"

"I understand. Yes, I can make you a Santa Teresa."

"But with permission, *maistro*, not too fast. There is something else to be talked of first. You know how it was with us last fall, when we sent our blankets to Durango. We could get no price for them, and rather than consent to be robbed by those city thieves, we brought them back. We did not sell any blankets at all last fall."

"Yes, yes, I know. It is truly a strange thing. Some people go cold and wet because they have nothing to put on their backs, and others make blankets and want to sell them. Yet the ones cannot buy and the others cannot sell. The merchants of this unhappy day are terrible. They want to sell for an eye out of your head something they have bought for almost nothing, and if they cannot do it that way, they will not do it at all. It is a disgrace, a veritable disgrace."

"If only you knew what we have to pay for dyes and cotton yarn, *maistro!* More than we can get for a whole blanket after it is finished. And then we must listen to people talk about how Mexico has been made prosperous under Díaz. Prosperous one devil!—forgive the word—and that is how it has been made prosperous. So, *maistro*, the case is that we have no ready money to pay for a little saint for our mother, and yet she grows old, and she has wanted a Santa Teresa for so many, many years, and . . ."

"Why, that is all right. That can be taken care of. If you have no cash now, you can pay me at the time of the corn harvest, or after you do sell your blankets, this coming fall, or any time. Any time at all."

"But we thought . . . I mean to say, what we talked over among ourselves . . . you see, we have some good blankets, and we thought that perhaps we could give you blankets instead of money, if you would take them."

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"Why, of course! With a family the size of mine, and with all the children growing, we can always use blankets here."

"Good, *maistro!* Now we can give our mother a birthday present. And what would be the cost to us of a Santa Teresa? We should like to give the very best we could afford."

"Well, that depends. How big a Santa Teresa do you want?"

"About three hand-spans high. I think mama would like that, because that would be big enough to be impressive, but not so large she could not make a shrine for it in the best room, where the visitors could see it and admire it."

"And would you want it carved with robes? Or just a figure to be dressed by your mother?"

"Just the figure, *maistro.* Think, only think, the pleasure she will have, making a little every-day dress for it, and little rope sandals, and then a silk dress for feast days, with silk slippers, and a little bit of a rosary out of seeds. I tell you, *maistro,* mama will be so happy with it!"

"I understand. Now as to price, the usual price for such a figure is twenty pesos, and you can give me whatever would be the equivalent of that in blankets. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Oh, *maistro,* we surely appreciate it. Heaven will reward your kindness. We will give you three blankets; more, if you wish them. Is there any particular kind of blanket you would like?"

"No, just one of your blankets. I know the pattern of your family, the black and white stripes on a *pardo* ground and I always admired it. You can go ahead and select the blankets to suit yourself."

"If you would not mind, *maistro,* what we should really

like would be to make the blankets especially for you. You understand, the very best blankets. Not one drop of dye. The black will be of black wool; pure, natural black wool. And we will pick out the sheep this summer, the best of the black sheep, and show them to you, the sheep that will be set aside to be shorn for your blankets. We want you to know we are appreciating your kindness."

"I can see those blankets will be something out of the ordinary. I'll be afraid to use them, if you go to all that trouble."

Mónico, the very swart younger of the brothers, had been clearing his throat, and now spoke for the first time. He was trying to act as though he were quite at his ease, but he was afraid he would be thought too presumptuous if he ventured to enter the discussion.

"*Maistro*," he asked diffidently, "could she have nice eyebrows and blue eyes, our mother's Santa Teresa?"

"Of course. How not? That goes without saying."

Mónico smiled shyly.

"How lovely she will be!" he murmured.

"And you could make her taking a step, not just standing, couldn't you?" inquired Juan eagerly. "Or would that make it cost too much?"

"No, that will not cost any more at all."

"And could she have one hand closed, with a hole in it, so that my mother could make a little wax lily for her to be holding sometimes?"

"Whatever you wish."

"And . . . and . . . and rosy cheeks . . . and . . . very red lips?" stammered Mónico, his black eyes shining.

"To be sure. I will make you a very fine Santa Teresa, never fear. And she will be finished in time, so you can give her to your mother on her birthday."

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"You shall have three blankets," Juan promised, as he and his brother rose to go, "the three finest blankets that were ever seen. You shall pick out the sheep yourself, *maistro*, and if you want a *dragona* ornament in the middle of the blanket, all you need to do is say the word. Good-afternoon, *maistro*. We kiss the hand."

"May God lead you along a good road," Don Jaime replied courteously, shaking hands with the brothers. "My salutations to your *señora* mother."

Don Jaime had already turned back to the work-bench when he was recalled by a timid knock at the post of the studio door. Young Mónico stood there, his hat held in both hands before him, so low that the *barbiquejos*—the two strings by which it was fastened under his chin when he wore it—swept the ground.

"Would it be too much," he asked very humbly, "if she should have fingernails painted on her hands?"

"Of course she'll have fingernails, *amigote*. And on her toes, too," the sculptor assured him heartily, clapping him on the shoulder. "You don't have to worry. She'll be a Santa Teresa you will all be proud of."

"Thank you, *maistro*. You understand, I did not want to offend, I know I should not have annoyed you again. But I did so hope she could have fingernails. I kiss the hand, *maistro*."



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O MATTER HOW CONSCIENTIOUSLY he might try, Desiderio could never work up a real interest in the Sunday night *serenatas* at the plaza. Ostensibly these were concerts, and to prove it there was always

a three-hour program of music by the village band of earnest citizen volunteers, upon whose sincerity never a soul in all the state of Zacatecas could have cast a credible doubt.

But it was no mere quest for melody that brought young and old flocking to the square after sunset. These concerts were community reunions. Families from the surrounding hills mingled with the town sophisticates in solemn walks about the outer rim of the plaza. Young girls came in the hope of finding the Prince Charming for whom they had been praying so devoutly to St. Anthony. Here at the *serenata* political campaigns were brought to a head, amorous intrigues were hatched, recipes and crochet patterns and gossip were exchanged, friendships were forged or broken, new horses and embroidered shawls were shown off, offenses were given which could be settled only by a duel—here, in

short, the body politic found an opportunity once a week to disregard the commonplace materialism of daily routine.

By the time Desiderio reached the plaza with his parents, it was already well filled. Don Jaime's family always made one formal circuit of the square to greet acquaintances. Then Doña Josefa would find a bench for herself and the children. Her husband remained with them only until his cronies joined him. Once formal greetings had been exchanged, the men went almost immediately to El Baluarte for their first *copita*. Thereafter Doña Josefa would be joined by one of her many friends, and that would leave Desiderio pretty much to himself, with nothing to do but watch the slow, concentric processions: the outer one—where the men walked—moving in one direction, the inner in the other. Thenceforth there was no further savor in the evening for the boy.

He would have given a great deal for permission to follow his father, since Don Jaime and his friends usually began one of their fascinating discussions where he could catch snatches of it. But they always seemed to leave just as the talk got interesting.

"Have you passed the week well?"

"Yes, of course; how not?"

"Any news?"

"Just what's to be read in the newspapers, all about the big exhibition that will open within the next few days, and what festivities are planned, and how many carloads of champagne will be consumed, and what magnificent exhibits the foreign governments have sent. The paper is full of nothing else."

"By the way, has Heraclio been sent away yet? I heard he might be leaving any day now?"

"No, he is still over there." Señor Ramírez jerked a

thumb toward the other side of the plaza, where stood the squat, rectangular block of the town jail, fronted by a narrow gallery on which a lone sentry paced his beat. "They will leave him there until they make a new draft. Apparently they are too busy with the peep-show they are setting up for the foreigners to pay much attention to what is going on in the provinces."

"They'll not leave him there very long, if anything should happen," Don Fidel observed guardedly. "One stout man leaping down on that sentry from the flat roof, and . . . *Tras!* It is all over. I could kick in the walls myself."

"Here are some others who would save you the trouble. No. . . . Over yonder!" Don Jaime indicated four horsemen who jingled out of the darkness of a side street into the lighted square. "Heracio's kinsmen, the four brothers González. They'd not be likely to wait overlong, if ever there came an opening for . . . Fine figures they make on those horses. *Charro* costumes look much better, always, than these citified clothes of ours."

Desiderio watched the brothers trot to the edge of the raised plaza, dismount, and tether their horses to the branches of one of the many cottonwood trees that had been planted along the sides of the square. Arm in arm, they joined the procession of promenaders: Juan, Mónico, Luis and Jesús María in order.

"It is heartrending to see Heracio's daughter when she brings food to the jail," Señor Ramírez was saying as the boy once more caught the thread of the conversation. "She is stopping in the González home, of course. She is safe, there, and that is the only thing that has kept Heracio quiet."

"Aha, my old ones!" suddenly interrupted Don Jaime, "now we have a real sight on which to feast our eyes. True?

Here comes the gift God has bestowed upon the womanhood of the town."

Desiderio looked in the direction of the sculptor's amused glance. A blooded horse had come prancing into view, bearing the erect and handsome figure of Coronel Rafael De la O, commandant of the district, in swanky uniform of dark blue, set off by cuffs, collar and piping of red, and by the polished gleam of belt and boots. At a respectful distance behind him rode his orderly, to whom, as he dismounted a moment later, he tossed the reins of his horse.

"El Tejocote! El Tejocote!"

The music of the Radeczky March rendered the words inaudible, but Desiderio knew they were being murmured here and there about the entire plaza, as person after person, calling the attention of his neighbor to the officer's arrival, made use of the nickname by which he was known throughout the district. The *tejocote* is a sloe, a plump and very red fruit, and the appellation had been given Coronel De la O when he was first sent to his present post, because of his unusually red cheeks and lips.

If the officer knew what was being said, he gave no sign. Withdrawn and aloof, El Tejocote stood beneath the tree to which his orderly had tethered the horses, refusing to join the strollers, disdainful of the sidelong glances which were cast at his tall figure from many a pair of bright eyes, idly tapping the side of one polished boot with his riding crop, or perhaps cautiously fingering the needle points of his waxed mustaches.

Desiderio realized with a start that his father and the latter's friends had departed. Now he had nothing to do but swing his legs, and listen to the rattle of conversation between his mother and Doña Carmela Pérez, who occupied the adjoining bench.

"... and you looked fine last Thursday when I saw you coming from church," his mother was saying. "You must be making a *novena*."

"Yes, of course. The red cow, you know," replied Doña Carmela. "She will calve soon and we want to be sure it is a heifer, so I have been making a *novena*. My husband laughs at me, but then all men are like that, and what I tell him is that certainly it can do no harm to be making a *novena* and maybe—who knows?—it might do some good."

"True enough. By the way, have you seen Dolores tonight?"

"Yes, she is here. She must be sitting on the other side, for I do not see her walking."

"Poor soul, I feel sorry for her. It must be a terrible come-down to know . . ."

"Then it is true, what they say?"

"Oh, yes, quite true. At first I thought her daughter was just getting a little fleshy, but you know there is no mistaking it now."

"Well, well, well! Poor Dolores! The certainty is she will not do so much presuming now, with a daughter who was married by El Padre Rincón." \*

Desiderio found it impossible to keep his attention focused on such inconsequentialities, and, looking idly about, saw that Don Guillermo Zaragoza and his wife, Doña Concepción, had stopped almost directly in front of the bench where he sat. They were the most handsomely dressed couple in the plaza, and no wonder, for Don Guillermo was the wealthiest landowner of the countryside, and Desiderio recalled hearing his mother say on numerous occasions that

\* *Rincón* means a concealed nook, and carries with it the implication that the site is not merely out of the way, but securely hidden; in other words, a secret lurking place. Thus it becomes obvious what that good lady, Doña Carmela, was driving at when she spoke of Father Rincón having officiated at a wedding.

Doña Concepción's dresses came from a place called Paris. Even to the boy there was something pleasantly attractive about the way the ruffles on Doña Concepción's parasol matched those on her long skirt.

Then he saw why the couple had paused in their stroll. El Tejocote, no longer aloof, was approaching. Transferring his riding crop to his left hand, he formally saluted the *hacendado*.

"Very good evenings to you," he said. Then, lifting his military cap with its intricate ornamentation of gold braid, he shook hands formally with Señora de Zaragoza. "Enchanted to see you, Doña Concepción."

"It has been long since we had the great fortune of a visit from you at the *hacienda*," boomed Don Guillermo's deep voice. "Not since you led a squad into the hills after two cattle thieves."

"I have been kept so busy elsewhere about the district, Don Guillermo. I was sorry you were not at home when I passed back with the thieves."

It seemed to Desiderio, who, for want of anything better to do, was watching the three adults while he squirmed uncomfortably on his bench, that a definite shade of annoyance momentarily darkened Doña Concepción's lovely features.

"Oh, you were there?" exclaimed Don Guillermo. "They did not tell me." He looked reprovingly at his young wife. "It is not a very great compliment to Coronel De la O that you did not mention his visit, my dear."

"But it is you who have forgotten," Doña Concepción assured him. "I told you the next morning that he had returned. Of course," and once more Desiderio thought there was that swiftly passing flicker of annoyance, "he was in too great a hurry to pause long enough for a visit."

"Perhaps I misunderstood you. Yes, yes, that must have been it, my dear. You must be right. I remember some one telling me Coronel De la O had captured the two thieves. That was a good stroke, Señor Coronel."

"Yes . . . I was . . . quite lucky on that trip."

"Oh, you are too modest. That is not luck. Every one knows your boldness and persistence, not to mention your determination," the landowner complimented the officer genially.

"And I have heard," added Doña Concepción with a smile which struck Desiderio as not very charming, "that you have a new sweetheart, a Beatriz, this time. Possibly that is why you were in such haste to leave us, that day at the ranch. Is she here tonight, this sweetheart of yours? Can you point her out to us? One of those fat little girls over there, perchance?"

"The señora must be well aware no one could vouchsafe a second glance to any one else after being dazzled by the radiance of her presence," El Tejocote replied gravely.

Desiderio listened to no more. It was stupid, not like the talk of his father and the latter's friends. His wandering attention was caught by the movements of Doña Concepción's parasol. Idly, apparently without aim, she was tracing figures with the ferrule on the bare earth almost at Desiderio's feet. As the design became plain, the boy's nose wrinkled in an expression of scorn. *Ujule!* What wretched drawing! It was well his father was not there to see it, for Don Jaime knew how to say unpleasant things about bad drawing.

For example, that one blob must surely be meant for a fish. But what a fish! All out of shape. And if that line above it was meant for the top of the water . . . Well! And that other thing beside it was evidently intended to

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represent a tree, but the fish was as big as the tree and who-ever heard of a tree growing out of the water that way? Perhaps it was a tree by the bank of a stream. Yes, that must be it; but he should certainly like to get up and show Doña Concepción how a thing of that sort should be drawn. Indeed, truly.

Evidently the lady herself realized that her work left much to be desired, for after stabbing at it several times with the point of her parasol, she suddenly obliterated the sketch with a small, beautifully shod foot, smoothing the sandy surface of the promenade so as to leave it quite unmarked once more.

Then Coronel De la O's riding crop was tracing lines on the same freshly smoothed bit of ground. Though almost as faulty in execution, his picture seemed to be far less ambitious. It was just a straight line, with part of a crescent above it, like a rising moon. El Tejocote seemed likewise to be well aware of the deficiencies of his draftsmanship, for a hasty and apparently petulant scrape from one of his boots erased all sign of it.

The officer was taking his leave.

"It is always a good omen, seeing you," he gallantly assured the Zaragozas. "I feel certain that fortune will be very kind to me tomorrow."

"I do hope you'll not be disappointed," smiled Doña Concepción.

"Nonsense, it isn't luck, it's ability," insisted Don Guillermo. "Such men as you, men of character, bosoms of bronze and all that, it is your kind who have made Mexico great in the councils of the nations. To an early meeting!"

"Until then," replied Coronel De la O, raising his cap. "At the feet of the señora."

The *bacendado* and his lady resumed their slow promenade, and El Tejocote followed them with his eyes, so that he did not see the four young men who, absorbed in their own affairs, were bearing down on him from the opposite direction. The one on the outside, young Mónico González, was likewise looking elsewhere. He had just received a note from a girl who had blue eyes, black eyebrows, rosy cheeks and very red lips. His attention was anywhere but on the path in front of him, for the note read:

"Who knows? Perhaps I might say yes."

Repeating the words rapturously, and with his head turned to catch a last glimpse of his *novia*, he jostled into the trim figure of Coronel De la O.

"Forgive me, Señor Coronel," he began awkwardly.

The officer brushed the sleeve of his tunic, as though this had been soiled.

"*Baboso!*" he drawled. "I should think they would keep you children at home until you learned how to walk!"

Mónico's brothers hurried him away before he could gather his wits. Robbed thus of what had at first promised to be an entertaining interlude, Desiderio slumped back on the bench. Then, at last, his father returned.

"Come, little mother," he said to Doña Josefa. "It is late. Time for the children to be abed."

As they left the plaza, they passed a group of four young men in the black shadow of a cottonwood tree. Three of them were having a difficult time of it restraining the fourth.

"But did you hear what the son of a whore called me?" this one raged. "Right in front of Beatriz and the other girls, where all the world could hear? Let me go, I tell you!"

Doña Josefa hurried the children out of earshot. Though he could no longer hear what was being said, Desiderio

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looked back over his shoulder and saw the straining group of four men, clotted into a single monstrous silhouette, and still furiously struggling. The band struck into the *thump-thump-thump*, *thump-thump-thump* rhythm of the "Blue Danube Waltz."



Y THE TIME THE SOLDIERS reached the bedchamber where the children were sleeping, the rest of the house had already been subjected to minute search. Doña Josefá gathered her brood protectingly about her while armed men stabbed bayonets through wool-stuffed mattresses and sounded the ceiling beams for hidden papers. Xochitl was crying, but Desiderio looked on sullenly. All his life he had accepted the idea that the authority of soldiers was no more to be questioned than the daily rise of the sun. Yet he felt a burning sense of outrage, of personal affront, in the invasion of his room by the *fедерales*.

Even after the squad left, and Doña Josefá took out the oil lamp, plunging the chamber once more into darkness, this feeling persisted. Too sleepy to be curious as to what the search was about, his resentment none the less continued to rankle until slumber claimed him.

Breakfast next morning was a silent meal, and Don Jaime seemed moody and preoccupied. When Desiderio followed him to the studio, he found his father staring unseeingly

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at the tools on his work-bench. The Señores Ramírez, Canales and Guzmán dropped in long before the usual hour for their morning visit. All of them had the same story to tell. Under the personal command of Coronel De la O, soldiers had gone from house to house, tearing apart the piled blankets in Don Eusebio's warehouse, rifling the papers in Don Jorge's desk, and not even sparing the little church of Señor Canales.

"Of course," the attorney informed them, "the first house they searched was the González home. They must have known they would not find the boys there. What they were really looking for was some pretext for action against Doña Mónica and against the girl Soledad, the daughter of Heraclio."

"Is it so well established that the brothers González broke the jail?"

"Every one assumes it. They had threatened to do so, you remember, because their kinsman was there, awaiting his draft into the *cuerda*. It makes a month now since they disappeared. They left as soon as they heard the revolution was proclaimed, and they have been somewhere in the hills ever since, waiting for an opportunity to join forces with the *maderistas*. Meanwhile all such bands as theirs—and there are plenty of them, my old ones—are raiding the big ranches for money and supplies, and opening the jails wherever they can, like they did here last night."

"That is why I asked whether it is certain that this was the work of the González boys. I do indeed wish I knew just what had occurred."

"I think I can tell you most of it, my friends, because I was taken past the jail when they made me open my church. The bodies had not yet been removed. From what was said by the soldiers who were my guards on the way, I could

pretty well piece together the story, and it is veritably horrifying. Not along such a path can the people of Mexico win through to the freedom they so ardently desire. No nation has mounted to contentment over the fallen bodies of its sons; no people ever waded to the promised land through rivers of new blood."

"Come, Señor Ministro," interrupted the attorney dryly. "Spare us your sermons, won't you? Moreover, we must make haste to get word to Don Fidel. There is no one else to warn him."

"He probably knows more about it than we do," Don Jaime suggested. "It would not surprise me in the least to learn that those boys and their followers have been hiding somewhere on his ranch most of the time since first they took to the hills."

"But that is specifically what I mean. If that is discovered, Don Fidel will be shot without further ado. Up to the present the revolution has been nothing but words, so far as we were concerned. Now it is different. Those sheep of deputies down in Mexico have declared Díaz re-elected for another six-year term, Madero has fled to San Antonio and has issued the Plan of San Luis Potosí; he has promised effective suffrage, no reelections, and the return of the lands the *científicos* stole from the villages . . . and up to that point it is for us only something to read about in the newspapers. And now this thing happens. This thing last night, whatever it was. This jail delivery and the killing of the sentries. We stand between blue dusk and good night, friends. Up to the present the revolution was something we heard about. Now it is here."

Don Jorge had been walking up and down as he spoke. When he finished, he flung himself into a circular leather

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chair, painted in bright colors, and stared moodily at the earthen floor.

"Naturally, that should cause you but little concern," he continued after a moment, addressing the sculptor directly, "considering how soon you and your family are to leave the village and move to Durango."

Desiderio pricked up his ears. This was news indeed.

"What difference?" demanded Don Jaime. "It will most assuredly be worse in Durango than here. After all, what is there in a village like this to tempt either side to capture it? A handful of sheep, a few blankets—and all of it miles from the nearest railroad—that's nothing for which to risk lives. But both sides will be fighting for the possession of towns like Durango."

"Then why should you leave the village at all in times like these?" inquired Don Eusebio.

"As I told you yesterday, the two statues they want for the Church of the Redemption are to be so large I must work on them there. A Saint Ann and a Nazarene. It will take fully a year. I do not wish to be separated from my family for any such time as that. So it stands we all move to Durango."

Desiderio hugged himself quietly. New places to see! A railroad journey!

No one spoke for a moment or two.

"Even here," Don Eusebio soberly broke the silence, "there will be raids and reprisals and God alone knows what else."

"But it was bound to come," the attorney insisted. "We can't feign surprise. Down in our hearts we have all been expecting it. For one, I welcome the day. Whether or not we live to see it, Mexico is on the brink of regeneration.

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Very well, then. Let us leave it at that while our Señor Ministro tells us what actually took place last night."

"You know how the jail is," Don Tomás began. "It has that gallery passing all the cell doors in front, where the sentry walks. The attackers—and it is surmised there were only a few of them—crept up along the wall of the city hall which adjoins the jail, so that they could not be seen from the roof, where extra sentries have been posted ever since the outbreak of the rebellion. One of the attackers jumped to the gallery from the ground and killed the sentry there with a knife before he could make outcry. He dragged this body into the open doorway of the guardroom where the three relief sentries were sleeping. These he killed with his knife as they slept. The positions of the bodies showed as much. After that, it is believed, he put on the *capote* of one of the dead soldiers, took a gun and mounted the ladder to the roof, as though he were himself a soldier, coming to relieve one of the two sentries there. One was killed with a knife, the other was lassoed from the ground and pulled down. If he was fortunate, he was killed by the fall."

"That was the one they mutilated? The soldiers who searched our house said something of the sort."

The minister could not repress a shudder.

"Yes," he said. "I got one look at what was left. The guards who took me to the church were of opinion a released prisoner had done it. One of them laughed and said: 'It serves the son of smut right. He has owed me twenty centavos for two months, and whoever mangled him no more than saved me the trouble.' It was the only body that was out on the street. Evidently the attackers released the prisoners as soon as they finished with the sentries. They opened the cells and, I suppose, told those poor devils they could be free if they would join them. Let it be imagined!"

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One of the freed prisoners must have put himself berserk."

"Pretty much the same thing has been happening elsewhere," observed the attorney. "And it will happen again and again before this is all over."

"They stripped all the clothes from the bodies of the guards, of course," the minister proceeded, unmindful of the interruption, "and they took the six rifles and all the ammunition, the shoes and everything. One of the prisoners must have been given a knife when the weapons were distributed. Whoever it was, he slit open the stomach of this guard who had been pulled down from the roof, and he dragged the intestines over the street. He hacked off the toes and thrust some of them into the dead nostrils and ears. He gouged out the eyes. The madness of slaughter! The madness of slaughter! It will engulf this unhappy land. It is the wrong path—the path that leads to darkness, not to light!"

"Yes, no doubt, but you don't try to rid yourself of a wolf that is despoiling the flocks by reciting kind words," Señor Ramírez retorted. "What have they to lose, anyway? Not even the name of slaves. Their lands are stolen, they cannot live on what is paid them for day-labor. If they object to having a daughter ravished it is the *cuerda*, and the courts are closed to them."

"The trouble is," Don Eusebio put in anxiously, "that it does not rid us of the wolves. If we could strike one bold blow and win, then it would indeed be worth whatever it might cost in blood and tears. But what will it all amount to? What is a so-called Madero? A maker of cognac who treats his workers better than most other employers, yes, but for all that, just another man."

"Even so," Don Jaime interrupted, "Díaz cannot live forever. Hence if the cataclysm does not come now, it will

come then. You will see it. Bear me in mind, old ones. This time, Madero or no Madero, Díaz or no Díaz, the people will not stop. As long as a man still had a home-stead, you could reason with him. But now they have nothing left to lose."

"What about their lives?" demanded the minister. "What about their immortal souls? Are those nothing?"

"You know very well, Señor Ministro, we do not look at this matter of immortal souls with the same eyes. If the people have such a thing as a soul, it is that part of them which goes beyond the mere animalisms of existence, food and copulation to satisfy appetites which plague us when they are not stilled. The intellectual life, the cultural existence, the arts, philosophy, science . . . all of this constitutes, if you will, a soul. That is the very thing the disinherited ones of our land can no longer lose, any more than a common prostitute can lose her chastity."

"Blood and torture, lusts and passions let loose upon a world debauched by slaughter . . ."

There was a muffled noise as of countless wool-wrapped sticks being drummed against an adobe wall. Desiderio recognized it at once for the sound of hooves in the deep dust of the roadway before the house. He darted from the studio, across the courtyard, and into the shadows of the arched carriage gate. More than a score of armed horsemen in the uniform of the federal soldiery were jogging toward the distant hills. Strangely stirred, he watched them until they had become a formless dust cloud which seemed to hang stationary above the outlying cornfields.

"El Tejocote was in the lead," he reported when he had returned to the studio. The adults did not resent the interruption. "They say on the street that the soldiers are going out to catch the escaped prisoners and the González brothers,

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that they will shoot them all against the cemetery wall,  
that . . .”

“Of course,” interrupted the attorney, nodding sagely.  
“Well, my old ones, the revolution is not merely a word any  
more, even here in the hills.”

“That demands a libation!” exclaimed Don Jaime. He  
fumbled for a coin, found it, and handed it to his son.  
“Run to the square, Lello,” he directed, “and get us a bottle  
of cognac. Tell them,” and he smiled whimsically at his  
three friends, “tell them to give you a bottle of the very  
best Cognac Madero.”

Desiderio was sorely disappointed that his father would  
not let him remain in the studio after he returned. But even  
as he left he heard the words of Don Jorge’s toast:

“A glass of revolutionary spirits to the spirit of the rev-  
olution! . . . and—my life in pawn for it, old ones—I  
predict that the headquarters of the pursuit column will be  
established at the Hacienda Zaragoza.”



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NE PICTURE CLUNG MORE TENACIOUSLY in Desiderio's memory than any other. That was the image of the old woman, hair in wild disarray, hands suddenly struck motionless at the beads of her rosary, mouth open, cheeks drawn, and throat working. Yet there would be no sound at all. She would merely stand there like the carved statue of a woman screaming. Then the spell would break, and into the silence there would creep once more the scuff, scuff, scuff of her worn sandals on the dusty cobbles, and the clashing of beads in the pendent rosary as *Hail Mary's* alternated with *Our Father*.

That had been going on for two days, ever since the evening when low sunlight had endowed an approaching dust cloud with sham substantiality, transforming the dancing yellow motes into a huge puff of something soft and downy into which it appeared one could leap as into the piled wool-sacks in the weavers' sheds. Even in the plaza there were but few persons abroad at that hour, so that perhaps no

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more than a score of onlookers witnessed the return of El Tejocote with his squad and their nine prisoners.

Ordinarily Desiderio would have missed their arrival. But the workshop had been closed for a week, his father had already left for Durango with all the tools, and the boy was at loose ends. Most of his idle time he spent dawdling about the streets, for he had been strictly forbidden to go beyond the confines of the village. Things were too unsettled. There were too many marauding bands about, and too many small federal detachments patrolling the remote settlements, seeking any sign that revolt would flare openly among the villages.

Captors and captives alike were coated with the powdery ocher-colored dust through which they had been riding when the slow cavalcade drew to a halt at the plaza. El Tejocote raised an individual cloud of it when he slapped the dark cloth of his uniform on dismounting. Thin nostrils flared in distaste as he viewed the travel-soiled garments. The prisoners watched him stolidly. They had no way to brush their rags, for their hands were tied tightly behind their backs. Indeed, they could not even dismount until the lashings which fettered their ankles beneath the bellies of the horses had been cast off. Only the eyes, and now and again their teeth, showed occasional flashes of white. Everything else had been reduced to the level tint of the all-pervading, all-covering, all-embracing dust.

In silence the horses and mules were tethered while El Tejocote waited impatiently for the horsehair rope he had ordered some one to fetch. When it arrived he tied a firm loop into one end and, taking a bayonet from one of the soldiers, thrust the point of it through the knot until this caught on the double-angled base of the knife where it was customarily attached to the gun barrel.

Desiderio looked on in wonder. Two of the brothers González were there, the two youngest ones, Luis and Jesús María. The other prisoners were all strangers. Smiling, El Tejocote regarded the spectators who had drawn closer to see what was about to take place.

"There will be a lesson," he announced. "We will see how many more of you will make attempts against the government."

He held the butt of the bayonet in his hand, straightening the coils of hair rope. It looked like an enormously magnified darning-needle, ready threaded.

"Bring me that one," El Tejocote directed, pointing to Luis González.

Still bound, the prisoner was led before the officer. Grasping him by the back of the neck, El Tejocote attempted by a quick thrust to pass the bayonet, sharp point first, into the skin beneath the prisoner's lower jaw, and out through the mouth, much as a caught fish is strung for safe keeping. But at the first stab of pain the bound prisoner jerked so violently away that the bayonet point failed to reach its mark, though a slow flood of red welled out of the wound it left, a carmine stream that spread over Luis González's breast and the soiled tatters of his coarse smock.

"Here, two of you, hold this *cabrón piojoso hijo de la tiznada!*" the officer snarled. Two soldiers leaped to obey, one on each side of the prisoner. "Keep him steady, now!"

Thrusting upward from beneath the chin, El Tejocote sent the bayonet home until the point was stopped by bone. Then, with unhurried deliberation, he churned the steel about, working it slowly this way and that. The prisoner's features contorted themselves into an appalling grimace. His eyeballs rolled backward until only a slim crescent of

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white showed between the lids. An instant later the lids squeezed convulsively shut. Lips drew back over the locked teeth through which a half-strangled moan escaped. Finally the torture of the steel point, tearing at the roof of his mouth, released the man's clenched jaws. He coughed, expelling a frothy foam of blood. On the instant, the upper section of the bayonet was slipped free through the victim's open mouth, but the angles where the hair rope was knotted fast resisted efforts to pull the knife clear.

Ordering one of the soldiers to give him his sweat-grimed neck-cloth, the officer wrapped this about the blade and for a time tugged ineffectively to draw it through. Once he stopped and, the prisoner's mouth propped open by the steel, probed into it with his finger to push the tongue aside. The man retched so violently that El Tejocote snapped:

"Hold his head still, you weaklings!"

Securing a fresh hold upon the wrapped blade, and exerting his full strength, he dragged the entire bayonet free, a blood-smeared section of rope following. Lips compressed beneath the mustache which had lost its usual waxed jauntiness, El Tejocote beckoned to the soldiers to bring him another prisoner.

"I'm only showing you what will happen to any, young or old, who rise in revolt against the government," he said grimly to the bystanders. "It is true I could have these men shot for murdering the prison guards, but I think the lesson will not be lost."

Some of the prisoners fell clumsily to their knees and began frantic pleas for mercy. One of them tried to run, but, hampered by the way in which his arms were tied behind his back, he stumbled and fell headlong. One of them called piteously on El Tejocote to think of his mother, his

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little mother, and kill them out of hand as a tribute to the tenderness of her who had suckled him.

Deaf to all prayers and entreaties, to all calls upon saints and the mild Virgin of Guadalupe, the officer continued to string his prisoners through the jaw, like so many freshly caught trout. Only once did he definitely lose control of himself for a moment. That was when one of the prisoners lunged so madly against the triangular steel that a great vein in his throat was torn, and the gout of blood which spurted forth drenched the breast of El Tejocote's tunic. He cuffed and beat the wounded man in a blind rage, but realized when the prisoner grinned at him that he had not only been outwitted, but that he was losing dignity in giving vent to unchecked passions.

"It stands I am not one of those you will torture," the dying man gasped mockingly, his voice thick with bubbling blood. "I will be dead in three breaths, or four, Tejocote, but through all eternity you will be . . ."

A rattling cough shut off further speech. El Tejocote was smiling his tight-lipped, cold smile once more.

"No matter," he retorted. "Your weight will make it all the harder for the others. Take that thought into the hereafter with you, child of the brothel. Their jaws will bear the weight of your dead body."

From behind, to shield himself against further blood stains, he worked the bayonet through the torn throat and out between the foam-flecked lips, detailing two soldiers to hold the dying man upright for the time being.

When the work was completed, he surveyed it critically, as might an artist, stepping back, his head tilted to one side. Before he was satisfied he directed minor readjustments, ordering the rope to be pulled farther forward through this gaping jaw or farther back through that, to space the strung

prisoners more evenly. Then the entire horrible string was made fast between two cottonwood trees, the hair rope being drawn taut about four feet above the ground, so that the bleeding prisoners could neither stand upright nor kneel.

Only the man whose throat had been torn sagged grotesquely, half dangling, half dragging the ground, like a badly jointed mannikin. Some of the prisoners, all awkwardly stooped, their hands still tightly bound behind their backs, uttered choking groans. They were unable to regurgitate, or even to expel the clotting blood that set about their lips. Swallowing spasmodically, they tried to clear their throats so that they might draw labored breath. Those on each side of the dead man sought to clinch their teeth into the rope, in order to relieve the agony caused by the pressure of his added weight against their jaws.

"Thus you will remain until the last one has died," El Tejocote informed them. Turning to the spectators, he added: "Remember what you have seen, and tell your neighbors and all others. There will be no half-measures; at least, not in my district."

From down the street, where dusk was beginning to soften the stark outlines of square, flat-roofed houses, there came a shrill, quavered keening, a sound that set Desiderio's teeth on edge and chilled him as had none of the bloody work he had just witnessed. Some one must have carried the word to Doña Mónica, for she ran screaming into the plaza and tried to hurl herself upon the taut rope.

"My babies! My babies!" Her voice broke in a discordant screech.

"Keep her away," El Tejocote said, without turning his head. One of the soldiers sprang to obey, but the old woman's frenzy had so multiplied her strength that another had to come to his assistance. Even so, she tore herself free,

and launched herself straight at El Tejocote's back, her fingers reflexed and tense, like poised talons. The soldiers caught her and, awkwardly, pulled her back.

"I myself will smear the doorway of my house with the brains from your skull, you son of a whore," the crone screamed over and over again. "I am old, but God and the Blessed Virgin, Mary of Sorrows, will let me live until the day comes when I cast your brains down upon my doorstep and mix them with the dung of dogs and mules from the street."

"I shall send other soldiers here at once to relieve you at guard duty. Let no one approach the prisoners," said El Tejocote to the sentries, not so much as the flick of a cheek muscle showing that he had heard the old woman's words.

Doña Mónica fell to her knees on the cobbles and beat her withered fists and then her forehead on the stones. Ripping her dress so that her flabby breasts were bared, she lifted veiny old arms and cried out to the spectators:

"Are you not going to do anything? Are you not Christians? In the name of Christianity, these are the sons of my body! What if they were flesh of your flesh? How can you stand idly by and . . . ?"

With a hoarse, dry scream she pitched forward in a fit and lay there, twitching. El Tejocote strode to his horse.

"Let the people stand around to see what is happening," he instructed the soldiers, "but they must keep at a distance. You will remain here until relieved." He paused before mounting to survey the great bloodstain on his tunic, and shook his head resentfully. "Spoiled, in all likelihood," he muttered as he swung into the saddle.

The next day, when Desiderio returned to the plaza late in the forenoon, three of the nine prisoners were dead, sagging stiffly from the rope, their weight dragging down those

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in whom life still lingered. Flies were buzzing by swarms in and out of the open mouths of living and dead alike. Many spectators had gathered, but there was little movement and no talk among them.

Eight soldiers patrolled the length of the rope, four on each side. A little beyond them, on the hot and dusty cobbles of the street, a disheveled figure slouched back and forth, her sandals making a dry, scraping sound. The large beads of a pendent rosary clashed as she walked, and her lips moved in the unbroken alternation of *Hail Mary* and *Our Father*. From her spent bearing all violence and rage had long since been drained. Now and then she would pause, eyes staring, mouth open, cheeks drawn and throat working. But there would be no sound. It was as though she were a carved statue of a screaming old woman, intense but silent. Before long she would be slouching back and forth again, sandals scuffing and beads clashing.

They were all dead by the following morning. All nine sagged from the rope in grotesque postures, rigid and unmoving. El Tejocote was summoned, and directed the torture line be freed from the trees.

A soldier had been dispatched for the one garbage cart of the community, a vehicle sloping back from two high wheels. Without halting to withdraw the rope, the stiff bodies were bundled into the bed of this cart and driven beyond the village limits to a shallow pit, newly excavated. To the edge of this the cart was backed, and then tilted so that the nine bodies slid in unyielding awkwardness into the communal grave.

Before an order to replace the excavated dirt could be given, Doña Mónica leaped into the grave and clawed with skinny fingers among garments harsh with dried blood.

"Come now, there's no good doing that," El Tejocote ex-

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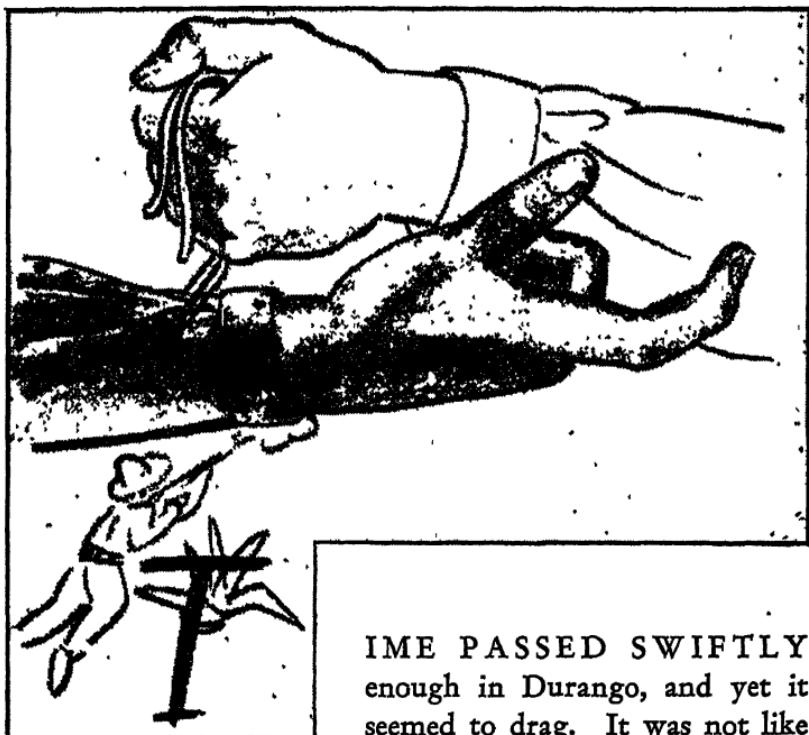
postulated angrily. "You might as well get out now as two minutes from now."

Fumbling among rigid limbs and swollen torsos, the old woman gave no sign that she heard.

"Then well and good," the officer snapped. "Fill it in. She'll get out soon enough."

Broken clods began to rain down into the shallow pit. After a time Doña Mónica climbed out, empty-handed. She had tucked her rosary into the cold bosom of what had been her youngest son. Silently the soldiers continued to send dirt down over the bodies.





IME PASSED SWIFTLY enough in Durango, and yet it seemed to drag. It was not like

the village. There was excitement and to spare, but it involved persons one did not know, and so it had not the sharp and intense meaning which invested the slightest happening in the little mountain town.

There were so many strangers everywhere. The men who came to the studio to visit his father seemed all to be alike. Save for the priests, they all wore the same sort of citified clothing. There were no long, intimate discussions to which one could listen if fortunate enough to be permitted to remain.

At rare intervals there might be a diversion. Outstanding in this respect was the advent of a bulky stranger who had but one hand, and who asked the sculptor to make him an artificial one of wood to fit the stump of his right arm. Desiderio had never seen anything like that before, but his father seemed to think it not especially out of the ordinary.

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"Yes, I can make you a hand," he said. "How would you like to have it? With the fingers bent so that you can carry a basket by hanging it on to them, or with the fingers extended naturally, and an iron hook in the palm for carrying things?"

The man hemmed and hawed for a moment and seemed to be ill at ease.

"Well, I tell you now, *maistro*," he said at last. "I came to you because I have heard reports about you. I mean, they say you are not one of those who adheres to the . . ." He paused, awkwardly. "Then good, let us be open. They say you are discreet about things."

"What does that wish to imply?"

"What I really want is just the forefinger extended, with a crook at the end . . . so that I can use the new right hand . . . to pull a trigger. You understand me? You see, I have trusted you."

"Yes, yes, certainly. I understand. What you want can be done. Where is your place? You are not from this part of the country."

"I am from north of here, but not far. I came some time since from Veracruz, where I was in the big textile mill riots. In fact, I lost this hand while I was working in the mill, and they discharged me. But it's no good, fighting down there. Up here in the north the men are more resolved, and there is something to be gained in campaigning. However, there's not much use for a one-handed man anywhere. You understand what I mean?"

"Surely. But have you any wood for the new hand? These willow blocks of mine, they are much too soft."

"Yes, indeed. There's a piece of *buizache* outside, taken from a tree to which some of my companions were found hanged by the federals. It is my fancy that the tree itself

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shall help to avenge them. You understand me, *maistro*? Besides, it is flawless, well-seasoned stuff, hard as iron. But I did not want to bring it inside until I was sure you understood."

"And the cost? Have you thought of that?"

"Whatever you say, *maistro*. I do not lack hard pesos even if I do stand in need of a hand."

Another gala occasion was the visit of Señor Ramírez, who passed through Durango on a journey, and of course was invited to share the noonday meal in Don Jaime's home. At the table the talk was all of acquaintances, but later, in the studio, it was different.

"I suppose everything is going along just the same," the sculptor remarked. "Or have there been any changes worth mentioning? Real changes, I mean."

"Because Madero has been president? What folly! Why, the simple little dreamer even left the old Díaz army practically intact—the same *jefes* in the same positions as before. Under such conditions, what changes could you expect?"

"Of course, nothing has come of that, but then we—you and I, at least—had not looked to see any real reforms from that quarter. He is an idealist, no more. A pity that this Villa had not more of the stuff that Madero has too much of. That would be a combination for you! But what I was speaking of was changes in the village itself. Has anything been heard of the brothers González?"

"Naturally, no. Nor of any of their followers. Oh, there are reports that Mónico, the dark-skinned younger one, has developed into quite a leader, but . . ."

"Really? You astound me. He was always shy and quiet. He would begin to stammer and blush if some one looked at him."

"Apparently that is one change that has been accom-

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plished, then. But for the rest, they are outlaws, and that ends the story. Similar bands are out in all the hills of Mexico—north, south, east and west. It was all very well for Madero to say, when he became president: 'My friends, the revolution has been won. Díaz is overthrown. Return to your homes and prosper.' But you can imagine what would have happened to such boys as Juan and Mónico González had they returned to the place where De la O could lay hands on them."

"That is precisely what I tried to tell our little minister all along. He was rejoicing so much about Madero's bloodless victories. Of course there was little fighting. There was little need, so powerful was the sentiment of the people. But he has been compromising ever since he became president; compromising with the very people he was to overthrow. Imagine it!"

"I know. And the villages that wanted their lands back, the workers who wanted decent pay, they all looked to this demi-god who let himself be bound hand and foot by compromises. No statesman, and most assuredly no politician, eh? Why, it wasn't a month after Madero's election that Zapata went into revolt."

"Ah . . . this Zapata! Another savage, an ignoramus."

"True, perhaps. In no sense the Moses to lead our people out of the wilderness. And yet . . . he has made his one watchword the return of the lands to the people. He did not fight for Madero the individual, any more than the others did. He fought for Madero as the embodiment of a pledge to redeem the stolen lands."

"What distresses me is the thought that Madero's weakness may give the *científicos* a new foothold. Under a strong, brutal dictator—a man like General Huerta, let us say . . ."

"But Huerta is one of Madero's generals. He is one of his stoutest supports."

"Don't be a child, old friend. Madero has no staunch supporters any more. There are a few who give lip-service for what they can get out of it, but they will turn on him the instant it becomes to their advantage to do so."

"Well, a great time has found a petty generation, I suppose. A pity! But, after all, I can talk politics with any one at any time. From you I would rather hear news of the village. So there are no changes, you say?"

"Except that we talk of you often and wonder whether you will ever return to sun yourself in the blessed light that shines upon our hills, and share our *copitas* at El Baluarte."

"Aye, I am looking forward so eagerly to that day myself. But there has been more work and more work here, and it is well paid, and I cannot afford to refuse it. Besides, the schools are so much better for the children. Embrace Don Fidel for me upon your return, and my other friends as well."

"By the way, do you remember a rather effeminate lad, Santiago Rojas is his name, who was studying for the priesthood? The boys used to call him El Joto Chago."

"Quite well. My wife, who is very fond of him, speaks of him frequently. He was sent away to some seminary, and may finish his studies here in Durango, she tells me."

"He is to be ordained this fall."

"Well, from all I have seen, celibacy should be no special hardship there."

"I am already saying it. On the other hand, speaking of opposites, El Tejocote is still casting gray hairs to the winds. And that brings up another item of news. You remember the Zaragozas, of course. Their union has been blessed with a son."

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"Oh, come along now, really?"

"As sure as anything you'll ever hear in church."

"Well, who would have thought it! Have you ever heard the old story of the man named Miracle, who was past eighty when a son was born to his young wife? The verdict of the neighbors was that if the baby was a real Miracle, then it was a real miracle; but that if it was not a Miracle, then it was no miracle."

"Not bad at all. I must remember it. Don Fidel will enjoy it. Isn't it remarkable how, in a case like that, the husband is always the last one to suspect? They've been carrying on under his very eyes."

"What can you expect when December takes April to wife? Another thing: Doña Mónica González, what of her?"

"I'm afraid she's quite mad, poor creature. Ever since those two sons were tortured to death before her eyes, she has been a mental case, and small wonder. That happened a short time after you left, I believe."

"I know. Lello told me about it. He was there."

"How that lad has grown! He's very much the man. Getting long and thin, isn't he? I remember when he was fat as a little pig . . . eh, Lello? I suppose you've got a flock of sweethearts by this time."

Desiderio, dreadfully embarrassed, left the workshop at once. So the revolution was not over, apparently. He had, of course, been bitterly disappointed when he heard that the Madero victory would put an end to all fighting.

There had been one brief but sharp skirmish not long after they had settled in the city. Horsemen had dashed into the town, barricades had been thrown up, and then other men, with sprays of green leaves fastened to their hats or

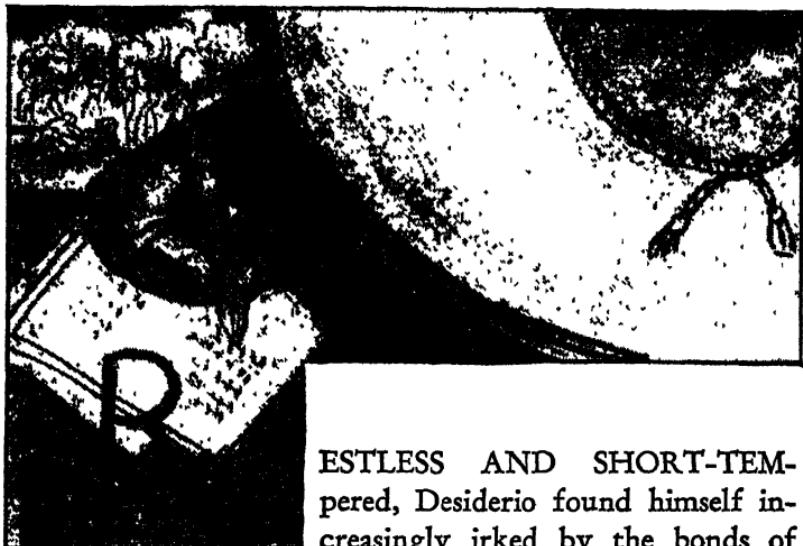
their sleeves, had come cautiously along the walls and had begun to shoot.

Doña Josefa herded the boys indoors at once, and tightly shuttered the windows. But when she busied herself with such infallible precautionary measures as the burning of holy palm fronds while reciting the proper prayers, the boys took advantage of her preoccupation to slip away to the front of the house where some of the shutters bore providential peep-holes.

There was little to be seen, though the firing was brisk enough. Now and again, however, a soldier would crumple up within the fan of visibility commanded by a peep-hole. Far too soon to suit the boys the cessation of the shots and, later, the pealing of church bells, announced that the battle was over. Heedless of their mother's cries, the youngsters rushed pell-mell out of doors. Along the entire length of the street, each doorway was disgorging its quota of boys, all eager to claim superiority for the home block in the number of fallen bodies. Vociferous quarrels followed.

While Jacinto led a sortie which occupied the attention of their rivals, Desiderio and Epitacio lugged three near-by bodies across the roadway to the block commanded by their home. They were prepared to extend this operation over a greater area, but a fatigue party of soldiers, detailed to take corpses beyond the city limits to be burned, removed all grounds for controversy.





ESTLESS AND SHORT-TEMPERED, Desiderio found himself increasingly irked by the bonds of family discipline. His mother's scoldings became almost intolerable. Strangely enough, he did not very much mind his father's occasional gruff rebukes. Toward his mother and his sister, however, he developed a sensitiveness which at times was little short of morbid.

Whenever possible, he took refuge in the studio, for the streets were all but closed by the siege which had been in progress for a fortnight. Huerta's federal soldiers still held the town, but out in the hills, under Calixto Contreras, was an army made up of countless small rebel bands, waiting to join forces with Villa, all suddenly united on a common focus of bitter enmity to the *científicos* who had so abruptly returned to power with the overthrow of Madero. The siege was tightly laid.

Though still spindling of body, Desiderio's cheeks had the smooth roundness of a girl's. His appearance, however, gave him little concern. Indeed, this was one of the things about which Doña Josefa scolded the lanky twelve-year-old oftenest. Xochitl, too, was scornful about his slovenliness. Ever since she had put up her hair, she had become almost insufferably adult in her relations toward all her brothers.

On one occasion Desiderio could have sworn he heard her humming in a barely audible tone, while she was busy near a window with her embroidery hoop. He was on the point of charging in to see if by any chance there were a suitor outside, but a sudden lassitude bade him turn moodily away. There were enough quarrels with Xochitl as it was. No need to go about seeking new ones.

Restlessness kept him from undertaking any work which required much time for its completion, and he devoted sporadic interludes of energy to simple designs whose strong, plain lines had the old gratifying effect on him. At the moment he was working out a flat panel which he had carved into a heart shape and smoothed with fine sandpaper until it had a surface texture almost like that of tightly stretched silk.

He supposed it would ultimately become part of a hatrack or something of the sort, but gave little thought to the function to which it should finally be devoted, rejoicing in the simple symmetry of line and surface. So strong was the fascination it had for him that he took the trouble to give it a "doll varnish," tying shellac flakes into a cloth which thus assumed the shape of a rag doll. Dipping the head of this effigy into a dish of alcohol, he rubbed away at the board, dipping and rubbing until the desired finish had been attained.

He had hardly laid the completed work aside to dry when Jacinto, coming up heedlessly, put his hand down on the still wet and sticky surface. Shrieking out all the street epithets he had ever learned, Desiderio flew at his brother in a fury. The uproar brought to the scene Doña Josefa, who had been suffering from an ulcerated tooth she could not muster courage to submit to a dentist for treatment.

Most of the night and all of the morning she had been

walking up and down her room, a small bag of hot sand pressed to her swollen jaw, occasionally murmuring an anguished prayer to Saint Apollonia.

*Santa Apolonia bendita,  
Abogada de las muelas,  
Quitame este gran dolor  
Y no dejes que me duelan.\**

But the prayer had gone unanswered. Consequently it was not at a very propitious time that the din Desiderio raised over the marring of his panel was added to his mother's other afflictions. When she burst in upon the two boys she was so deeply shocked by the robust flavor of her baby's vocabulary, that she administered a sound and immediate spanking.

This indignity was the last straw. Desiderio left the house without forethought or preparation, and with no other idea than that he would go far away and never return. Only thus, as he conceived it, would it be possible for him to bring home to his family the injustices he had been made to suffer. They would be sorry when they missed him, and they would wish him back with them, and perhaps his mother would cry. But it would be too late. He would be

\* "Blessed Saint Apollonia, patroness of the teeth, rid me of this great affliction and do not let them hurt me."—There are still in many parts of Mexico patron saints for most organs of the body, usually deriving their special qualifications from the type of martyrdom to which they were subjected. Prayers for the relief of pain or illness are therefore commonly addressed to the patron saint within whose special province the affected organ falls. Indeed, there is a particular patron to receive prayers for the cure of what are sometimes euphemistically described as "social diseases"—Saint Apollonia was one of the virgin martyrs who fell victim in Alexandria to the mob excesses committed during the celebration of the millennium of the Roman Empire. She was taken to the city gate and there commanded publicly to utter certain blasphemies. When she refused, her teeth were broken out by blows. She was further threatened with death by fire if she maintained her refusal. By way of response, she leaped into the already blazing pyre herself and was consumed.

off somewhere in the world, seeing a new place whenever he chose to do so.

Putting this decision into execution was not altogether simple. Every avenue of approach to the city was under a heavy guard of federal soldiers. Between the town proper and the mezquite-grown plain which stretched northward to Cerro Mercado, sandbag breastworks had been thrown up, and from the railroad station to the roundhouse ran barbed-wire entanglements, all of them under constant patrol. On the other hand, but for this very condition, the boy might have been back in his home as soon as his fit of the sulks had given way to hunger.

Dropping into a gully that paralleled a switchtrack, he wriggled unobtrusively through the wire that lay beyond. Once in the mezquite, he moved more swiftly, being careful, however, to take advantage of anything that might serve to screen his course.

Save that in the vaguest and most general sort of way he knew there were rebel soldiers somewhere beyond the town, Desiderio had no idea of what lay ahead of him. The world looked wide and empty. When he thought he was far enough from the city limits, he sought easier walking and began to make his way eastward. He had gone a scant fifty yards, however, when two figures popped out of the scrub with the startling abruptness of a conjurer's trick. One tall, one short, both of them ragged, unkempt and wispily bearded, each carried a rifle and wore the crossed ammunition bandoliers of the Mexican soldier.

"*Alto!*"

Thoroughly frightened, Desiderio had come to a halt even before the sharp command was uttered. The tall soldier looked at the short soldier, scratched his head, spat, and finally remarked:

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"Well, then, will you look at that young rooster!"

"What rooster nor what nothing," scoffed the second sentinel. "He's never even seen the rooster run." \*

For an instant the soldiers and the terrified boy stared at one another in silence.

"What do you want?" the tall one demanded at length.

"N-n-nothing," replied Desiderio tremulously.

"Better search him, Chato," the tall soldier continued. "He must be a spy or the *pelones* † would never have let him through their lines, isn't it true? If he has any letters on him, we'll know what to do. Go on, *cabrón*, don't fall asleep."

"But, Toribio, how'll we know whether he's got a letter?" El Chato inquired.

"I'll know."

"I suppose you've learned to read and write since last you ate beans."

"No, Shameless, but I can tell if it is paper and has writing on it, isn't it true?"

\* *Correr el gallo*—"to run the rooster"—is a pastime devoted to the festive observance of St Peter's day in the rural sections of Mexico. Mounted bareback, the contestants are lined up at one end of the course. A rooster whose feet have been bound is tossed into the air near the center of the field, at which signal the contenders start. Unable to do more than glide, the rooster sails groundward. The object of the game is to capture him and bear him to the other end of the course. The unfortunate rooster is rarely alive by the time this issue has been decided. Indeed, he is rarely in one piece; in which event the player reaching the goal with the largest fragment is declared the winner. *Correr el gallo* is as strictly rural a pastime in Mexico as a hog-calling contest or a husking bee in the United States. Hence, to say that some one has never seen the rooster run is to characterize the person thus described as a city chap, utterly ignorant of country ways.

† *Pelón* means bald and was applied to the federal soldiers because under the Díaz régime the military regulations made it mandatory for every soldier to keep his hair cropped short. Another term derogatorily applied to the federal troopers by the revolutionists was *mocho*, which means "cropped, shorn, or mutilated." This was generally regarded, however, as referring not so much to the military haircut as to the vizor of the Díaz soldier's military cap, which, instead of being rounded in a forward bow, was squarely cut across the front, as though it had been chopped off short.

"Indeed, I haven't even got one single letter," Desiderio protested shakily. "I am no spy."

El Chato ran his fingers into the boy's pockets and under his collar in what passed for a search.

"It's the mere truth. He has no letters," he reported.

"In that case he has probably come to spy out our positions so as to tell the condemned federals about them."

"Then good, shoot him, and that ends the story."

"No, let's take him to my Colonel Tejada, and let him have the decision. My belly is full of this business of doing something and then having everybody say: 'Stupid bastard, it's all wrong. You should have done just the opposite.' To the demon with that!"

"Ay *chingao!* You're certainly right. Let's take him to the colonel at once."

Bickering back and forth, and herding Desiderio ahead of them, they straggled across the *mezquital*, skirted the base of a low elevation, and were in the tumbled helter-skelter of the camp. Colonel Tejada, whom they found under a tree, was dressed exactly like his soldiers, with no distinguishing mark to serve as badge of office, unless it were the fact that his shoes were of better quality and his silk scarf more elaborate, which merely meant that as commanding officer he had taken first choice of any spoils the detachment had been able to reap in its forays. Beside him, on an empty ammunition case, sat his aide.

"Here's a little something we caught in the bush, my colonel," reported Toribio as he prodded the unwilling boy forward.

"A spy?"

"How do I know? He did not carry papers."

"Have you searched him?"

"Assuredly."

One of the bystanders snickered unpleasantly.

"He doesn't look it," he remarked. "You ought to give him a miner's search. Every day, when we came up out of the mines after our shift, we got it. They'd take a stick and ram it up into our . . ."

"Stick nothing! How about using a bayonet on the *cabroncito* to see if he's swallowed any papers?"

"Hah," grunted Toribio scornfully. "You fellows from the gold mines had it easy, isn't it true? I worked in the quicksilver mines, and every night when we got through they gave us each an enema to make sure we weren't carrying away any of the quicksilver."

"All right, then give him an enema."

"But with a bayonet, I tell you."

"Shut your snouts, all of you," commanded Colonel Tejada. Then he turned to Desiderio. "What were you doing out there?" he asked.

"I ran away from home."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I just ran away. They—they beat me."

"Hmmm! And where are you going?"

"To Torreón."

"What for?"

"I don't know. Just to see a new place."

"Do you know any one there?"

"No."

"What do you expect to do when you get there?"

"I don't know."

"I'd give a good deal to find out how you passed the federal lines around Durango. Do you know who we are?"

Desiderio hesitated.

"Maderistas?" he ventured doubtfully.

"Yes. And you are going to stay here with us."

"You mean be a soldier?"

"Hmmm! That depends. You can stay with us by enlisting or by being buried. We can't afford prisoners."

Desiderio's heart quaked at the words, for they meant something real to him. He had no illusions about death as an abstraction. He had seen too much of it, particularly as meted out by soldiers. He knew that when you died you bled all over and your eyes got white and the flies crawled into your mouth and you were a horrible sight.

"*Epale!*" exclaimed a new voice. "Hold on there for a minute. I know that bantam."

A bulky man shouldered his way into the open. Desiderio recognized him instantly. He would have known him even had he not caught sight of the painted wooden hand whose index finger was extended and so hooked at the end that it would serve to pull a trigger.

"That's no spy!" the newcomer announced. "Why, it was his father who made me this hand which will yet send many a *pelón* to the burial-ground. His father is a famous sculptor and I have known about him a long time. Otherwise, you may well figure, I would never have ventured to order from him this kind of a hand. You understand me, eh? This boy is no more a spy than he's the eye of an ax."

Desiderio heard him with a distinct feeling of relief.

"I will enlist," he said very promptly. "What must I do? Will I have a gun?"

There was a general laugh.

"No, we haven't even enough guns for all the men," Colonel Tejada told him. "You'll be a flag boy. We are always running short of them. They do not last so very long."

Desiderio was pleased to hear this, for he thought it meant that the boys grew up and were promoted.

"Give the sergeant here your name," the officer continued.  
"Write it down, Perico."

The soldier thus addressed was not bearded like the others, and he was a blond, a *rubio*. Little more than a boy, he seemed nevertheless to be a person of some importance, and all the bystanders edged forward to give their undivided attention to the rite that was to follow. El Perico produced a worn composition book and a stub of indelible pencil. Licking the point carefully so that it left a purple mark on his tongue, he held the pencil expectantly poised.

"Your name?" he inquired.

"Desiderio Triano de Parra, at your orders."

"Father's name?"

"Don Jaime Triano."

El Perico laboriously set this down.

"When were you born, and where?"

"In 1901, at San Antonio del Mezquital, to serve you."

"Why, he's a countryman of El Prieto," remarked one of the onlookers. "That's the identical village El Prieto comes from. He'll be able to tell us if this cockerel is all right."

"Then good. You, Toribio, get him a saddle and some flags," directed Colonel Tejada. "We'll see how long he lasts. God knows I was afraid the supply of banner boys was never going to renew itself."

As he left with Toribio in search of equipment, Desiderio felt completely and blissfully happy. So this was what it meant to be a man! At home he would have been squabbling with his sister. Now he had already been threatened with death as a spy, he had been enlisted in the army, he would have a horse and saddle for his very own. New places to see, indeed!

They wandered at a leisurely pace about the camp.

Toribio seemed to know every one, and wherever they went his wide and toothless grin seemed to be welcome, whether he stopped for a chat, or to borrow a cigarette, or merely to exchange pleasant indecencies with one of the *soldaderas*.

These "soldieresses" were all busy with preparations for supper and indeed the whole camp seemed to be a collection of tiny, vertical columns of smoke, springing from the ground everywhere. In the still air, these rose unwaveringly until they dissolved. Wherever one looked there would be three small stones, set at the points of a triangle which enclosed a fire of wood chips and dung cakes. Above it was the pot of beans, and near the coals were the roasting pods of plump green *chiles*.

Each fire was tended by a woman, for almost all the married men who joined the revolution brought their wives with them. That a wife should follow her husband into the field was more or less a matter of course. On the march one could see them, these seasoned *soldaderas*, each with a heavy stone *metate* for grinding boiled corn bound to her back, the string of a tethered goat fastened to her girdle, a sack of corn and beans in one hand, perhaps a baby in the hollow of the other arm, and usually a guitar or a caged parrot stored somewhere about her person.

Arrived at a camp site, each man selected his own place as he pleased. Within the moment housekeeping would have been set up—three stones for a fireplace, a blanket spread on the ground, wood chips and dung cakes for fuel, the goat staked out to graze, and corn soaking to be ground into *tortilla* meal. Usually the woman of each such family cooked for two or three of the bachelors as well, these being her husband's closest friends and sharing the task of providing corn, beans and chile, or shooting an occasional range

cow. In all the rout there were but few prostitutes who followed the army for what they could get.

Somewhere along the ramble about the camp Desiderio accumulated three short-staffed red flags, and after a vast amount of arguing, Toribio acquired a saddle into whose leather-covered wooden pommel, near the horn, a hole had been bored.

"That's so you can hold the flag when you're riding hard," Toribio explained. "When we go in to fight, you lead the column, you know. You ride on to wherever the colonel tells you to go, and then we all come up behind you to wherever you are."

"Will they be shooting at me, the condemned federals?" Desiderio asked.

"Indeed, yes, but they can't shoot. You'll have a fast horse. You'll need one—isn't it true?—to stay ahead of the column, for we've all got good horses. Yai-ya-yai! We're fighting the *pelones* with their own horses and their own guns. Every rifle we have, almost, has been taken from a *pelón* who didn't need it any more. Except Villa's men. He has bought fine guns and shoes for all of them. I haven't got a uniform yet, but I'll have one soon. Shoes, too, after we get to Durango."

"Will there be a rifle for me, Toribio?"

Toribio laughed uproariously, displaying toothless gums and slapping his thigh.

"No more than listen to him!" he cackled. "Why, there aren't enough rifles for the men, much less for such a newly joined *mocoso* as you."

Desiderio looked crestfallen, but it was all so new and interesting that nothing could possibly cast him down for very long.

"Where will you get your shoes in Durango?" he inquired.

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"The stores will all be closed. They put up the shutters and bar the doors when they hear there's going to be an attack. I have seen them do it."

"Ho-ho! Little Innocent! You'll see those doors go down once we take the city. We help ourselves to anything we want. Anything at all. Clothes or food or drink or anything."

"When will it be? I mean, when do we go in to Durango?"

"When? Ask the officers. They know everything and tell us nothing. We've been sitting out here in the sun for two weeks now, and what for? Just to be sunning ourselves, I guess, isn't it true? Not that it's so bad, but why can't they hurry it up? I don't know. Maybe they don't want us to see the girls in Durango. Have they any pretty girls there?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then you'll have to introduce me to some amiable ones."

They had come to the horse lines, where Toribio immediately raised a great pother about picking out a mount for Desiderio, selecting a blue roan after a violent debate with the soldier in charge, who protested this gelding could not be had.

"Go take the horse-dung out of your ears, you devil's abortion," Toribio advised him pleasantly. "My Colonel Tejada says the boy is to have that particular horse. He is going to lead our column into Durango when we attack."

"And that will be fifteen days after never," growled the man. "There'll be nothing left in the town worth looting by the time we go there. Everything will have been picked over, and we'll get no more than the pure leavings."

"That'll be good enough for you, isn't it true? Too good." He turned to Desiderio. "Bring your saddle and

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flags, *mocosito*. You might as well eat with us. El Chato's wife cooks for me and Bernabé and for El Perico too. You'll enjoy hearing that Perico talk when he gets started. He's the one who wrote down your name when you enlisted. It's a wonderful thing, this being able to read, isn't it true? You should hear him tell about our holy cause."

"What holy cause?"

"May the Child of Atocha aid me, how can I say? He's the one to tell you all about it. No more than wait till you hear him. Then you'll know. *Achi!* Smell the beans everywhere, and the peppers? Come on. I have much hunger. Hurry!"





ERE AND THERE COULD BE heard the plunk of guitars and the mournful plaint of some such song as *El Abandonado*. Desiderio and his hosts squatted about the smoldering embers of their fire, the men smoking and the woman suckling an infant. All about them glowed tiny points of ruddy light where other fires were dying, as though some giant hand had sown the *mezquital* to sparks. On the whole, the camp presented a curious air of domesticity; it might have been the abiding-place of some tribe of shepherds who had settled there to pursue their pastoral activities.

Of the four men who sat about the fire with Desiderio, one had not been among those he saw when he was first haled into the camp. Little, and all but hidden by the vast brim of his conical hat of plaited palm straw, there was something so likable about him that one was instantly drawn to him without really knowing why. Perhaps it was because his eyes were large and mild as a fawn's. Perhaps because of the infectious laugh which made one forget the deep pitting of pock-marks in his face. Perhaps because there was that in his presence which suggested an air of

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agreeing with all the opinions any of the others expressed, no matter how contradictory these might be.

"I tell you, soldiering is no good without a girl," Toribio asserted. "I'm going to get one when we go into Durango."

"Who would have you, Toothless?" scoffed El Perico.

"A man doesn't need teeth to win and hold the affections of the women. Now you, all you've got is that pretty face and the gift of conversation, isn't it true? But as for me . . . well, just ask them who's their sweetheart, and why."

"Better not let them see you smile, though."

"Why not? Do you suppose the village of Cerro Blanco has no women? We have almost all of us lost our teeth there."

"That's right," affirmed El Chato, nodding sagely. "It's the quicksilver that does it. Whatever happens, this is better than the mines, isn't it, *compadre?*"

"I'm already saying it. Even when you do not swallow the quicksilver to steal it, there is something there in the mines that makes your teeth come out."

"How do you know, *cabrón*? You always swallowed plenty."

"Was it possible to live if you didn't steal? Our *patrón*, may the devil be roasting his fat carcass, knew we could not even eat for the whole family on what he was paying."

A strange glow had come into the eyes of El Perico, like a reflection from the waning embers.

"That is all done with, now," he began raptly. "The new day of the humble is at hand, and when it dawns, the oppressors will be cast down from high places. Nothing better could have happened for the Cause than the usurpation of Huerta."

"Well good, but I don't know," El Chato commented. "That is what they all said when Madero was there in the

palace. "The new day is here." And so I went back home, but what was it? Did they pay me any more for my work at the loom? Did the *patrón* treat me any better? No. Life was just the same. To the demon with all these new days, I said. We could live better out in the hills with El Prieto, who was our *jefe*. Hear, now! I figure to myself the revolution is won. That was what everybody said when Madero became president. The poor little Señor Madero! So what was the use of fighting any more? But El Prieto said we would see, and we did. I don't know anything about holy causes, but my belly knows when I do not get enough to eat, and so I went back to El Prieto, and ever since then we have not had to worry, my little old woman and our children and I."

"Of course, that's the trouble," El Perico broke in upon the rambling discourse. "There are so many who are with us simply because it is easier living."

"That is not true," retorted El Chato hotly. "I like to kill *pelones* just as well as anybody else does."

"What difference? Some are here because they like to kill *pelones*. Then good. But so few of them really know the tremendous thing that is behind it all. I . . . I see a man and a woman and their child. They are martyrs, victims of four centuries of oppression by church and by state and by capital, serfs who have built up the land their fathers owned only to have it pass to other hands, cuffed and beaten and despoiled and robbed, and still humble. But the end of the man's patience was reached, and when he straightened the back that had been so long bowed to the lash, all the world saw that he was a giant, and all the world was afraid. Díaz fled, and the giant seated Madero in the palace. But Madero was afraid too. He did not give the giant back the lands of which he had been robbed.

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He did not give him the vote that had been withheld. He did not give him a living wage."

El Perico's voice had become a sort of pulsing chant.

"He is demanding his own; nothing more. He demands the right to live in peace and comfort, and he will have it if he must butcher every living thing that blocks the path. He thought he had reached his goal in Madero. He was mistaken. Huerta is trying to profit by that mistake. The giant will make a mock of Huerta. No matter. There are other leaders. Somewhere in this land there are men who will do the giant's will."

"All this talk of leaders," grumbled Toribio drowsily. "What I want to know from the leaders is when we are going into Durango. Wait till you see the shoes I'll be wearing after that. No more sandals for me."

"From the ranks, everywhere, they are springing, from high and low, these new leaders of a holy cause. There is great Pancho Villa, the peon, the cattle-thief, one of the humble ones himself, but humble no longer. There is the statesman Carranza, governor of Coahuila, who has sworn not to rest until some one has succeeded where Madero failed. There is the Sonora rancher, Obregón. They are all doing the will of the giant, who knows that Huerta is trying to bring back the old days. None can enchain the giant anew. Mexico will be triumphant, not in the person of a ruler, but in the persons of all the humble ones, the disinherited ones, the toilers and the artisans and the miners and the field laborers. Shoulder to shoulder . . ."

"If the leader gets me a pretty girl when we reach Durango, then good. Of course, I am no giant, but I do the best I can, isn't it true? And the girls seem to think that, all things considered, I am still . . ."

"Ah, you make many oral conquests," jibed El Perico.

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"But when you get into Durango you'll bloat yourself on drink like a freshly filled wineskin, and from then on you'll be *pasado*. You think we don't know you? But the rest of us—eh, Bernabé?—we'll give ourselves a big swing."

"Well, I don't know," the pockmarked little man replied. "I should like to get something nice for my little sister. Something to make her quite proud, you know. A new dress, for instance. Perhaps a pair of those shiny shoes, who can say? And when the revolution is over . . ."

"Yes, yes, when it is over. Tell me, *compadre*, what are you going to do when the revolution is over?"

"Oh, go back home to take care of my sister, of course," Bernabé replied gently. "True, she may be married by then, who knows? But she is a fine housekeeper. I didn't have it bad, before the revolution. I was the sweetmeat seller in my town, and had a great deal of esteem. I was a sort of public character. The men would all pass by my corner and chat with me, but best of all, the children would come around. I'm very fond of children."

"I'm surprised you haven't made arrangements to acquire a family," grinned Toribio. "Now as for me . . ."

"Well, there was my little sister, you see," Bernabé interrupted apologetically. "She has not been very well. She had the brain fever when she was a little baby, and her foot grew badly after that and she cannot walk well with it and . . . but do not misunderstand me, she's a wonderful house-keeper, I do assure you. Such *gordas* as hers you never tasted."

"How did you happen to join the revolution, in that case?" asked El Perico. "I suppose you, too, did it because you like to kill *pelones*?"

"Well, no. To tell the truth in all honor, *compadre*, I must have been a little drunk that time, when I joined. Not

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that I regret it, of course. You see, in the mornings my sister and I would bake my little cakes, and after the siesta hour I would go to a corner of the plaza and set up my tray with its folding legs and stand there in the shade, switching the flies away with an ox-tail. It gives one a sort of feeling of dignity to wield an ox-tail on a stick like that in public. Sometimes—please do not laugh at me, though—I would imagine it was a scepter, because, after all, I was a sort of a public figure, you know. I was always there at the plaza in the afternoons. And so, now and then, when I stopped in at the *cantina* of an evening, there were plenty to say: 'Hai, Bernabé, come take a drink.' Sometimes I got a little drunk, because it is hard to refuse when there are so many friends, and besides, it is nice to be a little tipsy, you laugh so much and all the jokes sound so merry. We were drinking one night, and some one suggested that we all join the revolution. Well, after all, there was my married sister who said she would be glad to take care of our little sister while I was gone, and I thought it might be a pleasant change to join the revolution, and besides, I could not very well refuse the friends who asked me to join, could I? Not after accepting their hospitality and drinking with them. The way they put it, I would be doing them a favor. So . . . here I am. And when Perico explains it, I like to think I am helping to do something big. After all, I was a sort of public figure in my village, it is no more than right and proper that I should set the example, don't you think?"

El Chato leaped up suddenly.

"*Quiñbole, Prieto!*" he called out. "Come over here with us."

El Prieto—"the black one"—swaggered out of the night to the circle about El Chato's camp fire. There was a

sort of dash to the cut of his clothing, and his hat was a stiff-brimmed American felt, no mere *guichol* of coarse palm straw.

"Here's a young *paisano* of yours who says he is from San Antonio del Mezquital," cried Toribio. "He joined us this afternoon."

Under the broad hat-brim Desiderio could make out none of the swarthy features, but even so there was something definitely familiar about the figure. If it had not been for that swagger! Desiderio could recall no one from the village who walked with so gay and ruffling a gait.

"Up, then, lad, and let's have a look at you," commanded the newcomer.

Desiderio shyly moved into the dim circle of illumination about the fire.

"Why, you're Don Jaime's boy, aren't you? Didn't you let us in that day?"

"I . . . I cannot see who it is," Desiderio stammered.

El Prieto took off the broad-brimmed hat, and then the boy saw.

"Don Mónico," he greeted him joyously. "You were there one day to order a Santa Teresa for your señora mother."

"Right. We were going to pay for it with blankets, but Juan and I sent the money for it, later. That was after we had gone out, when we found that money was not so hard to get if you didn't try to earn it. If this revolution ever ends, we'll make your father the blankets anyway. Of course, there are only the two of us now. But that must have been after you and your family left."

"No, I was still there," Desiderio told him. "I saw it . . . the whole thing."

"You did, truly? Tell me about it."

Mónico cast himself down upon the ground with the others, and they all listened gravely as the boy described the punishment El Tejocote had dealt his prisoners. While he spoke, there rose up before him the picture of Mónico's mother in the street, mouth open, but not screaming. There was another picture, too, of Mónico himself, standing humbly at the studio door, his hat held so low in his two hands that the *barbiquejos* swept the ground, seeking forgiveness for his presumption in asking that the Saint Teresa for his mother might have fingernails. It was hard to reconcile that Mónico with this Prieto who swaggered as he walked, who gritted his teeth now and cursed bitterly.

"They sent me word, but you are the first person I have talked to who actually saw it. Well, I have taken an oath; I swear by God in the heaven that what my mother wished for she shall have, and that is the split skull of El Tejocote in order that she can do with his brains what she will."

"To think that any one could halt the cause by torture!" exclaimed El Perico softly, shaking his head. "Annoy the giant, you haughty ones, if that gives you pleasure. That is what Huerta is doing. But never complain if, now that he has been aroused, he crushes you."

"Are you comfortable here, *paisanito*?" asked Mónico of the boy. "If not, my wife—she was Beatriz Villalobos; I don't suppose you remember her, but she ran off shortly after I left and joined us; she was with child, and . . . but no matter. You will be more than welcome to come with us."

"Hold yourself, that's our *mocosito*!" Toribio protested. "Didn't I provide for him all this afternoon? I got him his horse and his saddle and flags, isn't it true? Leave him alone."

Later, when Desiderio stretched out on the sandy ground

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for the night, Toribio promised to steal a blanket for him the next day. This did not help to keep off that night's chill, of course, but Bernabé, noticing the boy's plight, rose and tucked his own blanket about him.

"Just say no more about it," he interrupted him gently when Desiderio began a half-hearted protest. "After all, I'm a sort of public character, and as such, certain things are expected of me, don't you see?"

Through a momentary medley of whirling dreams, the boy sank into deep sleep.





ADDLING THE BLUE ROAN WAS A task far beyond the boy's unaided strength, but Toribio, who had taken him jealously under his wing, helped him.

"When we get into Durango, you look for me," he told Desiderio. "You'll be there first, but we'll follow you in. I can hardly wait for my shoes. *Ay chinitas!* How handsome I'll look!"

By midafternoon the various columns had been posted and Colonel Tejada gave the banner-boys their orders.

"When you hear the bugle, you ride from here as straight as you can toward the city, straight ahead till you get to the plaza," he said. Then he chuckled and added, his eyes twinkling: "When the federals see you coming, they won't wait. So after you get to the plaza, just sit down on a bench and rest, enjoy yourself in the fresh air, and find some amusement until we arrive."

They were at the edge of the *mezquital*, just beyond the old cemetery at the foot of Cerro San Juan. Between them and the sandbag breastworks of the Huerta soldiers lay open country, much of it bare, with no trees to screen

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movement. Brassy trumpet calls sounded along the entire line. Here and there horses emerged from the sheltering fringe of the mezquites.

Ludicrously small, a boy was perched on each horse, flag snapping in the breeze and clearly visible above the level plain. Looking to the right and the left as he trotted out into the open, Desiderio could see these other banner bearers, and the sight took away some of the gone feeling that had been clawing at the pit of his stomach. Each of the boys, anxious to show the others how little frightened he was, began to urge his mount on to an ever faster pace, until they were all pounding toward the distant line of sandbags and wire entanglements at top speed. In a shrill treble, the flag-bearers began to scream at the top of their piping voices:

"Here come your uncles, *pelones*. Here come your little fathers! Now we are going to blister your behinds for you! Run, *pelones*, your *padrecitos* are on the way."

Bullets whined and mewed above and about them, with a very occasional "Crrrrack!" to mark the passage of the missile from a high-powered rifle. White smoke-puffs and black burst into bloom at the line of sandbags but, hypnotized by their own voices and the exaltation of the moment, the boys galloped on. Desiderio's gelding was the first to go down, and thenceforth he saw nothing more of the combat, for the roan rolled over onto his right leg, pinning him fast. Luckily, the carcass lay between him and the federal lines.

He was not hurt. At least, there were no joints displaced or bones broken. But in order to extricate himself he would have to expose his head and part of his back. Otherwise he could not secure sufficient leverage to pull himself clear. Since he could hear and even feel the shock of bullets thudding into the body of the blue roan, he flattened him-

self against the ground, head turned to one side, and hoped darkness would not be too long in coming.

Into the circumscribed range of his vision there flickered a tiny bit of movement. An ant crawled toward his face. He shifted one hand to crush it, but drew back at once, warmed by the thought that here was something he could kill but chose to let live. Without putting the idea into words, or even shaping it expressly, he hoped the symbolism of this might not be entirely wasted. Moreover, there was something companionable about the bustling of the eager insect, so intent upon its affairs. He scraped up a ridge of sand, a mountain range it would have to climb, and watched it struggle laboriously to the crest. A swift excavation with one finger sent the range down in a landslide, ant and all; but with indomitable persistence the little fragment of life struggled free. Again and again he played such games with it, almost forgetting his plight in the absorption that claimed him.

Then a new note snapped into the confused crackle of firing, the nervous stutter of a machine-gun. Mounted men swept past him in all directions; at least, so it seemed to him, for he could not bring himself to raise his head for a look. The movement ceased and the machine-gun opened up once more. The dead horse seemed to be trying to roll over upon him at times. He could feel the carcass yield and give to the impact of projectiles, as though the gelding were flinching from further punishment. When that stopped, he could once more hear the whine of bullets passing overhead toward some more distant target. Quiet fell at length. He looked for the ant, but it was nowhere to be found. Already daylight was beginning to wane. He waited until he could discern stars against a still pallid

sky before he raised himself on propped arms and began to struggle.

He rubbed his right leg, dancing to the exquisite agony of pins and needles as pent circulation was restored. Then he loosed the cinches under the torn belly of the gelding, and tugged the saddle free by main strength and loud grunting. Shouldering it, and picking up his flag, he started for camp, wondering whether his army was still sufficiently intact to have returned to its old position. He realized from the direction in which the last firing had come that the attack on Durango must have failed, but also—and this with a surge of relief—that the federals must have chosen to remain behind their breastworks rather than risk the exposure which a foray to mop up the field would have entailed. He slipped through the lines unchallenged and headed like a homing pigeon—or a very hungry boy—straight for El Chato's campfire.

"*Achi!* No more than look!" Toribio shouted joyously. "Our *mocosito* returns, isn't it true?"

Jumping up, he caught the boy to him in a tight hug, lifting him clear of the ground, saddle and all. Little Bernabé clapped his hands in delight and hurried to relieve Desiderio of his burden. Without further ado, El Chato's wife brought out tortillas and, spreading one of them with beans and shredded peppers, rolled it into a *taco* and handed it to him.

"With the scare you have had I imagine your tripes have been well emptied," she observed, grinning. "Here's something to fill them again . . . and try to hold it inside of you long enough to keep your navel from growing to your spine."

El Chato likewise seemed glad to see him. Only El Perico continued to stare moodily at the fire.

"It would have been better for the cause," he grumbled, "to have had some one with a rifle and ammunition come back. All that equipment lost! Men and banner boys are easy enough to get, but guns and cartridges are worth their weight in hard pesos."

"Shut your snout, *cabrón*," Toribio advised him savagely, "or I'll slit open your belly for a refuge to the holy cause. The boy's a real fighter. Tell us all that passed with you, Little Valiant. When I saw your horse go down, almost at the pure beginning, I thought we had worn out another flag boy. Look, Perico, he even brought back his flag and his saddle. I'm going to get him a fine horse tomorrow, so he'll be right in front the next time we go out to burn the tails of the *pelones*."

Four days later, after the various columns and even the camp had been shifted to new positions, the attack was launched once more. This time Desiderio's company was sent in from the east, along the road that bordered the walled main canal, the *acequia grande*. As before, he went galloping madly ahead, piping his shrill challenge to all condemned federals. As before, he heard the whine and buzz of bullets. But, apparently daunted by the concentration of rebel forces along the city's eastern front, the defenders forsook their breastworks and sought refuge in and on the outermost flat-roofed houses.

The horses of the attackers leaped the sandbag barriers and drummed pell-mell along the road, through the brief fire the outpost directed at them. Desiderio rode blindly ahead; so blindly that he was past the plaza, which was their objective, and in the winding, tree-shaded drives of the alameda along the canal bank before he became aware that he was alone. Crackling musketry fire from the plaza woke him to a realization of what had happened. Throw-

ing away his flag, he turned his mount; for while there was no shooting here, the solitude of his position appalled him. The brief flame of excitement which had emboldened him to shriek at the *pelones* that their little father was upon them had long since flickered out. So he rode slowly toward the plaza, very slowly, sorry he could not induce his horse to take shorter and more leisurely steps, and yet afraid to remain longer alone.

The square was a milling chaos in which attackers sought shelter beneath the arches of the market-place, the municipal palace, and any other available arcades and doorways, from a galling fire directed upon them from the tower of the Church of San Francisco and the roof of the Hotel Richelieu. Occasionally detachments of federal troops stamped along side streets from the suburbs toward the plaza, but such bands were dealt with quickly by those in the square. Then a group of revolutionists split away somehow from the main body, if there were still any such thing as a main body in that seething confusion. Carrying Desiderio along by the sheer force of their sudden movement, they came storming back into the alameda, beyond which lay the barracks where the city's regular troops were garrisoned.

The barracks opened fire on them, but here, at least, were trees behind which one could take shelter, so that the attackers flung themselves from their saddles and sought cover at once. There ensued an interval of desultory firing, which was a restful relaxation compared to the inferno they had just quitted. The revolutionists were quite content to remain quietly behind their respective trees. Now and then a bullet from the barracks would pass too close to one of them for complete comfort.

"Ay *chingao!*!" the man would exclaim fervently, returning the fire instinctively. Ammunition was too scarce and

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too hard come by, however, to be wasted. For the most part they shot only at definitely selected targets.

"Another *pelón* to me," one would rejoice.

"What yours nor what eye of an ax!" would be the immediate retort from a neighbor. "I got that son of shame—not you."

"We'll see. When we go in there, if he's shot in the face, it was my bullet."

Now and then a missile from the barracks would score a direct hit. Whenever this happened, the victim's companions went through his pockets, for possessions of any sort were much too precious to be thrown away. Perhaps they would cut the buttons from the clothing, if these were particularly good. The body was then rolled cautiously to the front, so that the mounting number of slain might serve as a barricade behind which it would be possible to move back and forth, taking care to keep low to the ground.

Suddenly, and without apparent reason, the defenders began to quit the barracks, crossing the canal by the nearest bridge and spurting off to the southwest. Perhaps the federal commander had realized that the position as a whole was no longer tenable, and had sent runners to all points to warn each detachment of government troops that the town must be evacuated. Victorious without quite understanding how or why, the revolutionists began to stream from all quarters toward the plaza, taking rifles, bandoliers, leather belts and shoes from the bodies they passed. Many a soldier stopped to doff his rags when he came to a corpse of approximately his own size, and garbed himself in the uniform taken from the body.

Then the church bells everywhere began to peal a metal-voiced pæan to the conquerors. At the outset, victorious soldiers tolled the ropes, but one by one they impressed

luckless civilians into this service, warning them on pain of death to keep up the clangor throughout the afternoon.

Desiderio left his horse tethered to one of the trees in the alameda. Long before he reached the plaza, he could hear the crash of breaking glass like a sinister treble to the deep chime of the bells. He was frightened by the changed demeanor of the soldiers about him, for they made no bones of cuffing him off the sidewalk and into the street. He was no longer a valiant little companion-at-arms, it seemed, but just a nuisance of a small boy with whom the men could not be bothered. Other banner-boys were accorded the same sort of treatment, so that it was not long before they gravitated toward one another in the plaza, forming a forlorn little huddle.

The tumult and the confusion were worse in victory than they had been during the battle. All the shops were tightly shuttered, but this merely served to heighten the riotous din. As the boys passed La Suissa, a large hardware store, they saw soldiers packed like sardines, trying to force an entry. Desiderio recognized El Perico next to the door, his broad hat gone, brown hair flying, and his face a mask of fury because the press about him left no room for him to swing the butt of his musket against the portal.

Maddened by this restraint, El Perico drew his revolver, turning it back under his left arm, and began to fire. Companions dropped right and left behind him, and others gave way in a sudden frenzy of alarm. Taking advantage of the space thus cleared, El Perico began to smash away at the door. With a rending crash one of the thinner panels splintered, and, reaching within, he released the bar that had baffled them. The door sagged. With a rush the crowd surged in, trampling the dead and the dying who had fallen under El Perico's mad fire.

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A few doors away a tremendous crashing of glass marked the breaking open of a *cantina*. So tightly was the place packed by the first inrush that the crowd which still clamored about the broken doorway could get no nearer the supply of liquor; but generous hands were tossing bottles out into the street, careless of where they might fall, as those inside swept flask after flask from the shelves. Two soldiers, snatching for the same bottle of tequila, flew into a rage, and neither seeing nor caring that half a dozen other bottles lay within easy reach, pushed back their hats, drew knives, and went at each other, each seeking to send home the ripping up-stroke that is calculated to disembowel an adversary. No bystanders so much as paused to watch the duel, which was only one of nearly a score of similar affrays being settled at various points along the square.

Even the boys caught the contagion and looked about for a place where they might join in the looting. The only establishment about which a throng was not already scrambling for spoil was a drugstore at the next corner. There was little in the place to tempt cupidity. Indeed, so sure had the proprietor felt that no one would seek to quench a thirst for booty with a handful of capsicum seeds or quinine capsules, that he had not even locked the door.

This was, naturally enough, a keen disappointment to the boys, but after a brief consultation Desiderio solved the difficulty by closing the door tightly so that he and his fellows could smash the glass with rocks in order to re-open it. They came with joy upon a counter display of bottled citrate of magnesia. Each of them swept up an armful. Laden with their trophies, they returned to the open. Too impatient to solve the riddle of the wired stoppers, they knocked the tops off the bottles against the corner of the curbstone, and guzzled the sickish stuff with grand gusto,

exchanging boasts, the while, over the number of *pelones* each had chased out of the city single-handed.

But the "lemonade" soon palled, and after consuming several bottles Desiderio could no longer deny a feeling of queasiness he was ashamed to confess to the others. So he left them and rambled across the square. He noticed that women were joining the soldiers at the various drinking-places. He knew quite well the sort of women they were. No other sort would have shown herself outdoors at such a time.

With a great hallooing a carriage came pelting down to the square, an officer at the reins, lashing the horses into a furious gallop as soldiers skipped in all directions. A woman clung to the seat beside the driver, and three other couples sat inside, waving bottles and tightly clutching one another and the carriage rails to keep from being flung out of the swaying vehicle.

A few steps farther along Desiderio came upon little pock-marked Bernabé, squatted on the ground beneath a tree and playing absorbedly with a stolen cash register, now quite bare of coin. Oblivious of the swelling riot about him, Bernabé would punch a key and crow with delight as a number-tag popped into view and the drawer sprang open to the accompaniment of a tinkling clang. Desiderio, standing near by, laughed with him, and the little man looked up, recognized him, and grinned his pleasure. His eyes were large and mild, like a fawn's.

"I'm going to take this home to my little sister, when the revolution is over," he announced proudly. "It's an out-and-out miracle. Nobody else in the village will have anything like it, and that will please her ever so much more than a new dress would. Look! It is necessary only to touch one of these button things, and it works like magic.

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The bell! How it rings, eh? In the drawer she can put all kinds of things. Here for her needles, here for her thread, here for the seeds for her flowers, here for her thimble . . . I tell you, this revolution is a wonderful thing!"

A man and a woman, both tipsy, reeled by.

"Whatever you want, my love, you just tell me, and it is yours," he was saying. "You want wine, eh? Why, if you want to drink wine from the very altar vessels in the cathedral, no more than say the word. You want a silk dress? By the dozens! Patent leather shoes? Only come. And afterwards . . ."

Desiderio, who had turned to watch the couple, saw that all the looters were no longer soldiers. He recognized townspeople, here and there, making the best of an opportunity to help themselves. Some were merely thrifty. Others were avidly seeking to even fancied scores with the wealthy shopkeepers they had so long envied. More and more fights were started over the spoils. Around the door of each shop and *cantina* lay a ring of wounded men, some dying, some already dead. Soldiers, staggering off under mountainous packs of loot, would find the burdens too heavy, would pitch the entire load into the street, only to plunge headlong into the nearest open store door for a fresh supply. About the ground, with the dead and the wounded, lay those who were stupefied by drink.

"Cognac!" screamed one staggering boy, a bloody rag about his head, a bottle held aloft. "Never before have I been able to taste cognac. Now I can swim in it. Now we're all free and rich. I can have as much cognac as the *patrón* himself."

He raised the bottle to his lips and gulped the fiery liquid avidly. Suddenly dizzy, he lurched against the tree,

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and slid slowly to the ground, the bottle dropping from nerveless fingers.

Almost at Desiderio's side there was a shot. One of his ear-drums felt as though it had been burst by the detonation. When he opened his eyes, he saw, twitching on the ground, his head blown into a bloody spatter, what was left of little Bernabé. A stocky soldier, hatless, long black hair tumbled in all directions, was running off with the cash register tightly clasped in his arms. The church bells were still pealing joyously.



INSTINCTIVELY THE BOY TURNED to flee. Blindly, unreasoningly, he felt he must put as much distance as he could between himself and the body of the shy little sweetmeat seller. As he ran there came to him the realization that in all the horde that packed the streets no one cared in the least who he was or what might happen to him. Only then did he recall that this was his home, that he could return to his father's house as a man and a soldier who had faced death in battle.

He thought: But I must not come empty-handed, for I have seen many new places. There must be at least a gift for my mother. Perhaps she will not scold if I bring her something she wants very much.

The afternoon's demonstration of how to acquire what one desired had not been lost on him. One had merely to take. Not in the shops, of course. For one thing, there was little enough left in them. For another, the temper of the men in that plunder-crazed mob was too uncertain.

The choice of a gift was simplicity itself. What Doña Josefa never seemed able to get enough of was linens, and

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he knew where to find precisely what he sought: namely, at the house of Don Valentín Peñasco, where, on every visit, his mother had flown into ecstasies over Doña Hortensia's linen chest—the embroideries, the damask patterns woven into the fine fabric, the size of the larger pieces.

First he must have a gun. It would hardly do to set forth on a looting expedition without one. But that was merely a matter of looking around. Sooner or later one was bound to come upon the body of a soldier whose companions, now deep in their debauches, had not yet salvaged his weapons.

The heavy wooden doors of Don Valentín's house were securely barred and bolted. Not a light showed anywhere, but Desiderio knew the family must be at home. This was not the sort of an occasion on which one went visiting. So he hammered valiantly on the heavy timbers, with his fist at first, and then with the butt of his newly-acquired rifle. The sound echoed hollowly under the arched *zaguán*, but was otherwise quite barren of result.

"They do not know who it is they have to deal with," he muttered angrily to himself. "They'll learn. Only wait."

He went back to the plaza in search of assistance, having first concealed his rifle, lest one of the soldiers take it from him. He hoped to find Toribio. That stalwart, he felt sure, would make short work of any house that denied him entry upon demand. For as long as half an hour he ran this way and that, but to no avail. At length he spied El Perico and El Chato leaving the square together. Overtaking them, he inquired breathlessly whether they had seen Toribio.

"Not for the past two or three hours," El Chato replied good-naturedly. "And what's more, you're wasting your time seeking him. He's a well-bloated goatskin by this time. He always gets that way. Tomorrow morning when

he wakes up, he'll have a *cruda*,\* and he'll be looking for boiled orange leaves and aguardiente. No use trying to find him now."

"Come on, come on," El Perico nagged impatiently. "Don't stand there chattering to that little monkey all night."

"What's happening with you? The boy's a good lad. There'll be plenty of girls, and as long as you have been waiting all these weeks . . ." He turned again to Desiderio. "What's the trouble? Is anything wrong?"

Impotent anger and disappointment had brought the youngster to the verge of an unmanly display of tears.

"I wanted him to help me," he said, gulping hard. ". . . I am trying to loot a house, and the people who are in it won't open the door for me."

El Perico's eyes lost their sullen impatience and began to glow.

"What's that? Tell us again!" he commanded.

"It is the place where they have some linens I want for my mother," Desiderio went on to explain. "I went to this house to get the linens they have, very fine ones, which mama has always admired, don't you see? But they won't open the door for me, and I don't know what to do. I thought Toribio would help me, because I want to bring my mother a present."

"Then good! Here's a promise of fun!" exclaimed El Perico. "Come on, Chato. We've got to help this *compadrito* of ours. It's our simple military and civic duty. Show us the place, boy. We'll open that door for you."

Eagerly Desiderio led the way.

\* *Cruda* is the feminine form of the adjective which means "raw, pitiless, cruel." To have a *cruda* therefore describes that physical and metaphysical status which, north of the Rio Grande, is termed a "hangover."

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"There it is," he announced. "I hammered and I hammered, but that's all the good it did me."

Eyes shining, El Perico sent the butt of his rifle crashing against the heavy door.

"Open up here!" he called sharply. "Open the door or you know what will come and get you!"

Still there was no response from within. Laughing recklessly, El Perico snicked home a cartridge and fired a shot through the door. He repeated this, trying to blow open the heavy lock.

"Wait, wait, wait!" came a muffled voice from within. "I come to open the door!"

The wooden portal creaked on its hinge-posts as it was swung back by a servant.

"What may be offered you, señores?"

Without answer, El Perico shouldered his way in roughly, followed by Desiderio and El Chato. Both the soldiers carried their rifles at the ready.

"Where are the people of the house?"

"I will show you," said the servant. The family was assembled in the living-room.

"What do you want of us?" asked Don Valentín unsteadily. "We are peaceable folk and have no weapons."

"We want nothing for ourselves," snarled El Perico. "That doesn't mean we'll not take something if we happen to see what strikes our fancy, or if we are kept waiting again." He seemed to derive a sensuous pleasure from the terror he saw in the countenances of those before him. "For the present, give the boy here what he demands, and be quick about it."

"All I wanted," Desiderio explained, "was some of the linens of Doña Hortensia to bring to my mother. She likes them so much."

There was a pause.

"Well, then? Are you going to bring out the linens or shall we search for them ourselves?" El Perico rasped.

"Just a little moment—do not be angry," fluttered Doña Hortensia. "I shall bring you whatever you want, only don't point guns at us, for the love of God."

"We'll do something besides point with them if there's any more of this business of pretending to be stupid," promised the soldier menacingly. He glared about the room while Doña Hortensia went to another chamber.

"How about the gramophone, Chato? Would you like to have it?" he asked his companion.

"Well, I tell you, my wife would like it, but that's the pure heart of the trouble," the latter replied regretfully. "She'd leave provisions behind to carry that thing and its plates on the march. And, besides, I can most surely get her another one somewhere else later on, before we return to our homes."

"Just as you say. But perhaps there is something else that you might wish. Look around."

Doña Hortensia returned, her arms piled high with sheets, tablecloths, pillows, napkins and other linens. Desiderio selected all he thought he could carry.

"A thousand thanks, Doña Hortensia," he said with a politeness of whose incongruity he was completely unaware. "May you all remain well."

Without further ado, he and his escort departed. At the door the two soldiers left him, with a hastily muttered goodnight, hurrying off in the direction of the plaza. He waited until they had disappeared before he retrieved his rifle from its place of concealment. Slipping the loop over his shoulder, so that the gun lay along his back, he once

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more picked up the bundle of linens, and turned his steps toward his home.

Ahead of him in the darkness he saw an armed man carrying a satchel. He recognized him for one of the paymasters and knew the satchel must contain banknotes, for there had been much talk of the "loans" that would be levied once Durango was taken. Almost on the instant there came from a near-by housetop the flash and the report of a rifle-shot. The paymaster went down like a poled bullock. Without stopping even to look, Desiderio ran by, stooping to pick up the satchel as he went, and scampered off into the darkness. Whoever had fired that shot would lose no time getting to the body, Desiderio considered as he dodged around the next dark corner. Stumbling and awkward because of the rifle at his back, the bundle of linens under his left arm, and the satchel dangling from his right hand, he sped ahead as fast as he could until, quite breathless, he stood before the gate of his home. He kicked at the wooden panels, for he would not put down any of the things he carried. From within he heard the sound of footsteps on the flagstones, and then his father's voice.

"Who knocks?"

"Desiderio. Let me in."

The smaller door which formed a part of one of the heavy carriage gates swung open, and Desiderio stumbled across the threshold.

"I have brought home a present for you, papa," he gasped, extending the satchel. "Here. It is from the revolution."

Doña Josefa must have been standing with her ear to the opening of a near-by door, for she appeared on the instant, as if by magic, and she was already scolding shrilly.

"And for me, young gentleman, you brought no present,

I suppose. Nothing, that is, except your buttocks for the spanking you have so richly earned."

"Leave the lad be, *mamita*," began Don Jaime placatively. "He's not yet in a position to realize . . ."

"But he will be in a position to realize it before I have finished with him. Why, I never heard of such a thing! Encouraging the child, indeed!"

"But I did bring you a present, mama," Desiderio urged anxiously. He knew the moment he heard his mother address him as "young gentleman" that the clouds were ready to burst about him in a tempest of maternal wrath. "I did bring you a present. Look, here it is. Some linens you have always wanted."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" screamed Doña Josefa. "The boy is a thief! It is not enough that he runs away and breaks his parents' hearts, it is not enough that he returns covered with grime and—my life in pawn for it!—crawling with vermin, but he has been stealing!"

"Now, now, *mamita*! Just try to bear in mind . . ."

"How can you stand there like that when your own son is a thief? God alone knows where he came by these things he has brought with him. Why . . . why . . . this linen belongs to . . ." Doña Josefa paused to examine the embroidered monograms and then began to swell visibly, her eyes almost starting from their sockets. ". . . They are from the home of the Señores Peñasco. Hortensia has been robbed by a child of ours, and he has the effrontery to bring these things to me and . . ."

Unable to contain herself any longer, Doña Josefa launched a cuff at Desiderio which caught him unawares as he stood there, the long rifle still strapped to his back, and sent him reeling against the wall. Don Jaime left abruptly, but his wife turned the soldier of the revolution over her

stooped knee and began to belabor him in a spanking which was not halted until her arm grew weary. Jerking the weeping boy upright, she pinched a handful of his hair just above the left ear, between her thumb and forefinger.

"Pick up those linens," she commanded. "Pick them up on the instant and march right back to the home of the Peñascos with me. You are going to give those tablecloths and other things back to Doña Hortensia; you are going to apologize to them and tell them how sorry you are; and you are going to be spanked once more right in front of them. I don't know when I have felt so deeply mortified. How in the world I can ever again hold up my head, I do not know. Come along!"

Tugging at the lock of hair she had never relinquished, she marched him out into the highroad and toward the Peñasco home. Halfway there she suddenly realized that her son had a particularly vicious-looking rifle strapped to his back.

"Take that thing off and throw it away," she ordered. "Oh, that the Lord God should have sent me so heavy a cross to bear!"

For one wild moment Desiderio thought of rebelling. But the habit of years was too strong; unquestioning obedience to an aroused parental authority in such moments of stress was not lightly to be thrown off. The rifle went clattering into the weeds which bordered the gutter, and Doña Josefa, who held the pile of linens while her son divested himself of the weapon, returned them to the boy's arms, took hold of his hair again, and sternly led him to the house he had quitted so bravely scarce half an hour earlier.

His eyes red-rimmed with weeping, tear-channels patterning the grime of his cheeks, his features twisted into a grimace as his mother tightened her hold on the tuft of

hair above his left ear, and his voice shaken by occasional convulsive sobs, he presented a picture well calculated to arouse the compassion of even the victims of his depredation. Doña Hortensia could afford to smile. Indeed, she and all the other members of the family laughed without restraint, until the very roofbeams rang to Don Valentín's guffaws.

"Dearest Josefa, if you could only have heard how politely he thanked me for them afterwards," Doña Hortensia said while she wiped the tears of merriment from her eyes. "Of course, it was fairly terrifying, seeing those two men. But if only you could have heard the boy!"

However, Doña Josefa would not entertain any suggestion of passing the matter over.

"To think that I should have brought into the world a son who would put me to such shame!" she said. "I know you have already forgotten the whole thing, Hortensia, but after the sin comes penance. Go on, Lello. 'I kiss the floor on which you walk . . .'"

"I kiss the floor on which you walk . . ."

". . . and tell you with all my heart I am sorry and will never do so again.'"

". . . and tell you with all my heart I am sorry and will never do so again."

"Don't stop. Do not stop, do you hear? 'I kiss your hands and your feet . . .'"

"I kiss your hands and your feet . . ."

". . . and I will pray to God and the Sacred Heart of Jesus to forgive me too.'"

". . . and I will pray to God to forgive me too."

". . . To God and the Sacred Heart of Jesus,'" his mother prompted him implacably.

"To God and the Sacred Heart of Jesus," he repeated dully.

Although the Peñascos protested and sought a remission of further punishment, Doña Josefa administered the promised spanking. This time Desiderio made no outcry. Perhaps the narcosis of suffering had dulled his sensitivity to merely physical pain. Perhaps Doña Josefa's arm was still too weary to deliver really punishing blows. Perhaps the pride that is born of desperation steeled him to endure the ultimate indignity in silence.

As before, by the hair above his left ear, he was led home and taken to the bathroom. Stripping his filthy clothes from him, his mother scrubbed him until he felt that she would flay him alive. To cap the climax, declaring she could run no risk of having the house infested with lice which might attack the other children, Doña Josefa called for a pair of shears and rough-cut his hair as close to the scalp as she could.

As he stumbled off to his bed he realized that so far as revolutions were concerned, not all the fields are sown to marjoram. Dimly he seemed to recall another occasion when, weary to the point of exhaustion, he had stumbled supperless to bed . . . navigating along with life until death should have come . . .



ESTING THE BUTT OF THE GOUGE handle against the hollow of his shoulder, Don Jaime deftly peeled away the smooth white flakes of willow wood, apparently quite unaware of Desiderio's presence. Suddenly, without raising his eyes from his work, he spoke.

"You want to go out and see your companions, of course."

"Yes," Desiderio replied cautiously. It did not even strike him as very odd that his father should have known. Raptly, but without curiosity, he kept his eyes on the curling flakes that fell away from the willow block as though the finished form were something already complete, a kernel within a husk of flawlessly fitted overlapping chips which the gouge was merely stripping away.

"But mother has forbidden me to leave the house," he added.

"I know. That will arrange itself, Lello. Leave it to me. Later in the morning I am going to take back the money you brought, and then . . ."

"But if I had not picked it up, the one who shot the paymaster was going to get it."

"There was no wrong in taking it. Do not misunderstand

me. I wonder if I could make what I am thinking clear to you. You have seen just a little tiny corner of an enormous design. It is like those companions you have been telling me about, the ones—so many of them, too!—who are in this thing because it is easier to live off the country than work for starvation wages. And that is not going to hold good much longer. The production of this country, even in normal times, cannot support armies like these indefinitely. And we are not living in normal times. But back of that little corner you have seen is a great mosaic, the pattern of a people struggling to find themselves, something for which they are giving their lives, a cause . . .”

“Perico was always talking about the holy cause, sanctified by the blood of patriots, and things like that. The rest of them used to make fun of him. I think he must be a bad one, though, because he shot his own people, too.”

“There are always some who preach a holy cause for their own selfish ends,” his father reminded him gravely. It was the first time in Desiderio’s life that the sculptor had spoken to him thus, as one man to another. There was something very warming in the realization of this. “What I meant was that apart from individuals, this money may bring that pattern one little step nearer, and when I take it back, I shall tell your mother that I want you to return it yourself, just as she made you return your other prizes last night. Then you can go to see your *compañeros*, so that they do not think you ran away from them because you were afraid. For you are through with soldiering for the present. You will go back to school, and if you do well there, then next summer we will see what can be done.”

It was no very difficult matter for Desiderio to locate the billet where his company was lodged. The streets were all orderly now. Armed sentries paced their posts every-

where. There was no brawling, no fighting. Some of the looters had evidently been frightened by this abrupt restoration of peace. Desiderio and his father saw a grand piano, askew on one corner in the mud of a side street where it had been jettisoned, the varnish of its rosewood top badly scarred, two of its legs pointing tipsily upward, as though, of its own volition, it had embarked on a debauch with such low companions as mouth-organs and xylophones.

Desiderio found his company billeted in one of Durango's finest residences. The big rooms with their long mirrors, polished floors of inlaid parquetry, and costly tapestries, served as barracks. Women bustled about the courtyard—cooking, of course. Little fires dotted the patio, each with its three stones or adobes, its piece of sheet iron for baking tortillas, its pot of beans. The revolutionary high command had seized the warehouses and granaries, so there was no lack of rations.

Toribio was hunched on the floor in one corner of what had been the dining-room, a tattered blanket pulled over his head and shoulders, the picture of woe and dejection. He looked up wryly, peering at his *mocosito* from bloodshot and red-rimmed eyes, making a pitiful failure of an attempt to smile his old, wide toothless grin.

"What's the matter?" Desiderio asked, appalled by the man's appearance. "Are you sick?"

"May the Holy Child of Atocha be my aid! What a *cruda* I have! I shall never drink again. I swear it."

"But what happened with you?"

"How shall I know?" He paused to stare dolefully at his worn sandals. "Not even a pair of shoes," he mourned.

Rising, he searched among the litter on the floor for cigarette remnants. At first he could find only what was left of husk cigarettes, but finally he came across two stubs

whose paper he split lengthwise after stripping away the remaining shreds of tobacco. Moistening the two fragments plentifully with spittle, he applied one firmly to each temple. They looked queer, those bits of paper, charred irregularly along one edge, stuck to his temples and half concealed by a tangle of disheveled hair.

"That will draw the pain out of my head," he sighed. "Let's go out into the open."

They passed through the drawing-room, where two women were ripping a superb Aubusson tapestry from an ornately carved and gilded chaise-longue, while a group of soldiers squabbled noisily as they hacked into saddle-cloths a deep-piled Persian carpet, glowing in wine-red and cobalt plush. Near an elaborate phonograph cabinet of Italian marquetry, El Chato was rolled up in his blanket, snoring tranquilly through the din. A soldier Desiderio had known in camp as Tata Noé leaned over the instrument, pressing a ripe fig against the spinning black record. The fruit burst as they watched, to the accompaniment of a splatter of cerise pulp and cream-hued seeds about the polished woodwork. Tata Noé gravely wound the crank on the side of the talking-machine, produced another fig and renewed his experiment.

Chico Núñez, one of the other flag boys, was busily stripping ivory tops from the keys of the grand piano. Some of them had already been whittled into mandolin picks. Nearby, El Cucho and his wife were engaged in an animated discussion over a detached electric-light bulb.

"If there were some way to send it home that would be the pure blessing," El Cucho exclaimed enthusiastically. "No more candles or oil to buy, no more lamps to clean, no nothing. Just hang this bottle from the ceiling on a string, and when dark comes, pinch the wall. *Zas!* Light! You

will have to guard it carefully, for it is in some respects a bomb. Manuel dropped one this morning and it exploded like a grenade, though no one was hurt."

By this time they were out in the courtyard and Toribio led the way to a shady corner of the orchard wall, where there was comparatively little of the prevailing bustle and confusion.

"I will be all right by tomorrow," he prophesied, "and then I am going to look for El Perico and burn him to death a handspan at a time, son of a thousand whores that he is. Listen, I come into the city with the column, and after the battle I go to get shoes. *Qué caray!* Mind you, I take a drink or so—what do I know?—a bottle, two bottles, it makes no difference, I have a stomach of iron, every one knows that, isn't it true? But I must have gone to sleep and it was night when I awoke. So I came to the district of the girls to ask for Perico, since I know well where that *cabrón* must be, and I am wandering up and down, looking for something to drink, and the women are calling to me, for of course they can all see I am something of a fine catch, isn't it true? But I say no, I reject them all, because I am looking for Perico. I have a plan that is to make us all rich; I have forgotten it now, but I remember very well I had it then, and a wonderful plan it was, too. Finally I find where he is, and I knock on the door of the house. Of course, I had been drinking some more. All that walking around is dry work, isn't it true? So I knock very loudly on the door, and I hear the voice of that shameless, that Perico, telling the girls not to open the door, but to pass out a bottle of aguardiente through the shutters, that that was all I was fit for, to drink, that they couldn't get any fun out of me any other way. Imagine! Wait till I catch him! No more than wait! He has been keeping out of my

way, and he has reason, isn't it true? I was going to smash the bottle against the wall, but as long as I had it, I drank it. Well, I finally woke up in some doorway. It was morning, and by the time I got here and started after my shoes all the shops were under guard, and here I am, not even a decent uniform, the same grimy rags I came into the town with. I suppose that's what I'm risking my neck in a revolution for! But no more than wait till I get my bayonet into his tripes. He and his holy causes! Ay chingao! What a life!"

He sighed profoundly, rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and pressed the heels of his palms against his throbbing temples.

"But the next town we go into, we'll do things differently, you and I, isn't it true? I'll let blood in streams out of the first *puñatero* that offers me a drink until after I have a uniform and shoes."

"But I may not be with you the next time. In fact, I know I won't be, Toribio."

"What's the matter?"

"My mother says I must stay at home and go to school."

"What shame! Really, now? But perhaps you will learn to read and write, and that's a wonderful thing."

"Next summer I might go out again. My father said so."

"Then we'll be together, of course. You wouldn't join any other company, eh?"

"Not without you. I . . . I wanted to tell you, I wanted them all to know I had not run away. Will you tell them all I was here, and that I hope all goes well with them?"

"Assuredly. Understood. Ay now, little soldier, this is a sad business. We shall miss you."

"Maybe the revolution will be over before next summer,

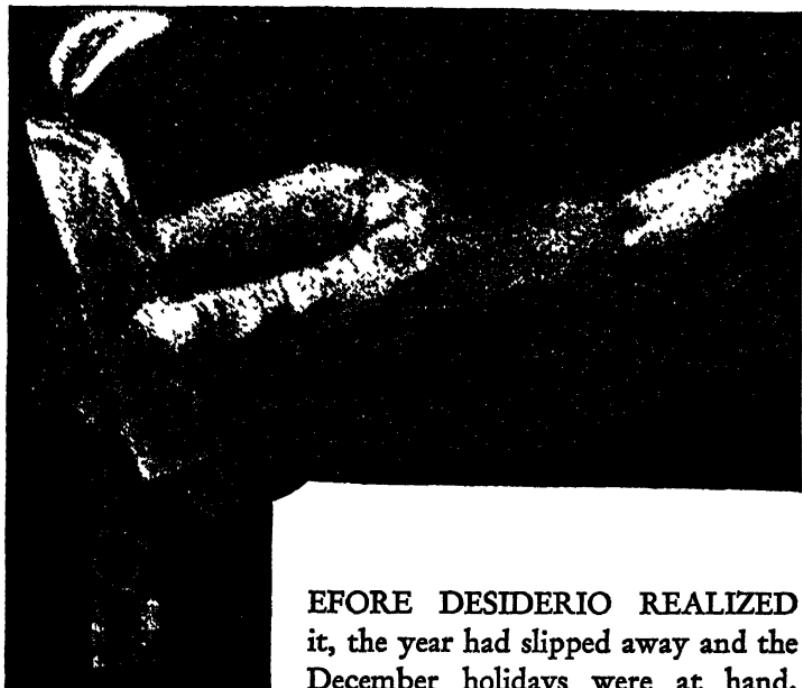
## THE WEDGE

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anyway. My father says it could be, but that it could also go on for years and years."

"Maybe it will be over, only God knows, isn't it true? But if it is, you must come to our village. We will slaughter a pig for you. We shall all be rich then, when the revolution is won, that is what every one says, and my children will have new shoes as soon as they are born. And, besides, if it is all over, maybe there will be another revolution, and if ever I get rid of this *cruda* we can be chasing the *pelones* together yet, you and I, little soldier, isn't it true?"





EFORE DESIDERIO REALIZED it, the year had slipped away and the December holidays were at hand.

These always began with the feast of Los Remedios, in which Doña Josefa and the children, bearing candles, joined the pilgrimage to a little chapel on a steep and conical mountain beyond the city. Then came the three-day festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a sort of glorified market-day: roulette wheels and panoramas and carousels and cock-fights and booths with prizes to be won, all forming a carnival village on the flanks of the hill of Guadalupe where the church stood.

Three days after this feast closed, began the nine nights of the *posadas*, when groups of families joined to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Pair, who once went from door to door in a vain search for lodgings. Desiderio and his brothers utilized this three-day interlude to build an imposing *nacimiento* in the living-room.

A *nacimiento* is a miniature world, often most wonderfully contrived of sand and clay and the twigs of evergreen

trees and mirrors and dolls and the figures of animals, to represent the earth the Redeemer was born to save. Don Jaime could have fashioned a magnificent one, but since this was the busiest season of his year, when he was turning out small wax figures from plaster molds for the humble folk who could not afford a carved statue, he left the building of the *nacimiento* to the boys.

Naturally they had to make out as best they could with what materials they might find, for at the holiday season the workshop of their father was all but swept bare. Doña Josefa always saved broken pieces of mirror to be used for lakes, but the toy duck that was put on the glassy surface was about eight times as large as the anachronistic toy steamship that plied the same body of water. Similarly the cow and the mule who occupied the otherwise vacant shed at the top of the *nacimiento* presented a weird contrast in proportions. But, after all, such grotesqueries were of little moment. The "trees" of evergreen twigs were loaded down with sloe plums impaled upon the needles, and although the oranges placed upon the ground looked like hogsheads by comparison with the surrounding woodland, the colors glowed satisfactorily.

Knowing she would never be able to persuade her husband to make her a statuary group of the Holy Family for home use, Doña Josefa zealously guarded a framed picture of Joseph, Mary, and the Infant Jesus which she had cut, years ago, from a calendar. It was a makeshift, but it had to do. During the first eight days and nights of the *posadas*, a piece of paper was pasted over that part of the framed picture which showed the Babe, for it was before the birth of the Christ-Child that the vain search for shelter had been made.

The group which ordinarily participated in the *posadas*

of Doña Josefa was to be augmented this year by the family of Mónico González. Mónico, a colonel now, lived at the Hotel Richelieu with his wife and their small son. They were frequent visitors at the Triano home. Señor Ramírez was coming to Durango for the Christmas holidays, too, but neither he nor Don Jaime would have anything to do with the *posadas*. They would remain at home, talking and sipping their drinks, while the others fared forth into the city.

Desiderio could hardly contain his excitement on the first night, as the visitors began to arrive. The Peñascos came first. Then there was the family of Don Marcial Torres, the tailor, who prided himself on his talent for amateur theatricals. He wore his hair long and beneath his smoothly shaven chin there flowed and billowed a voluminous Windsor tie of black silk. Upon the slightest provocation he would recite *Las Golondrinas* with gestures.

There was also the widowed neighbor, Don Octavio Ríos, superintendent of the slaughter-house, whose two daughters played tinkling, four-handed duets on the piano. Though he was a small man and sparely cast, his mustaches were larger and more fiercely martial than Don Fidel Zataráin's, and his *charro* garb was even gayer and of finer materials.

Then there was Doña Enriqueta Tovar, a widow, who brought her daughter Marta, a girl Desiderio cordially disliked. She was a year or so older than he; just enough to prompt her to give herself airs, he thought.

By the time the last of the visitors had come, the entire patio was crowded. Doña Enriqueta, Doña Beatriz and Tía Lola took lighted candles and left at once, because they must be in readiness to refuse lodgings to the pilgrims when these came to ask shelter for the night. A few minutes

later the rest of the party started, the women in the lead, Doña Josefa carrying a tall candle in her right hand and the picture of the Holy Family in her left. The children walked with their respective mothers, carrying their candles very carefully, and the men brought up the rear. In the dark street they could see clustered points of light here and there, where other *posadas* were on the march, some quite near, some far off.

The first stop was to be at the Ríos home, opposite the sculptor's house, and as they crossed the street the pilgrims chanted in chorus:

*Ya van caminando  
Los esposos santos.  
Vamos, vamos todos,  
Siguiendo sus pasos.*

Through the tightly closed door came the voices of Doña Enriqueta, Doña Beatriz, and Tía Lola, inquiring lyrically:

*Quién á estas horas  
Viene á incomodar?  
Quién tranquilo sueño  
Nos viene á quitar?*

Then those who stood outside asked for lodgings, explaining the situation, and the three women behind the door replied that an inn stood just a short distance down the street, suggesting that any one who sought accommodations for the night might well apply there. Whereat those in the street made answer:

*Somos unos pobres,  
No tráimos dinero,  
Ni prenda que valga  
Par' el mesonero.*

But despite this plea of poverty, lodging was refused and the applicants departed. They took a roundabout way to the next house, the Peñasco home, in order to give Tía Lola and the others time to get there ahead of them. At each house the performance was repeated, until at last the party returned to Doña Josefa's living-room, where the hostess led a full rosary service. Since this consumed an hour, it was difficult to maintain order among the children throughout that period; especially among the boys, who took advantage of the devotional absorption of their elders to pinch one another slyly, or to make funny faces which would bring upon some hapless youngster the disgrace of laughing aloud during prayer. More than once Doña Josefa raised her hand threateningly, palm outward, without interrupting the recitation of a *Hail Mary*, to serve as a sort of sword of Damocles, warning the boys what impended after the service if they did not behave.

This failed to have any deterrent effect upon Desiderio, however, because he was bent upon annoying Marta Tovar to the fullest possible measure. His dislike for her presence transcended the bounds of ordinary reason. All he knew was that it made him acutely uncomfortable to have her look at him, or even to know she was where she could look at him if she chose. Even at ordinary times, when the exigencies of daily life forced him to pass the house where she lived, he invariably did so on the dead run, breaking into a sprint when he was two or three blocks away, and maintaining this tempo until the house lay a good safe two or three blocks behind him.

Now he knelt as far away from her as he could in the spacious living-room, but ever and again he would steal glances at her, out of the very corners of his eyes, while he pretended to be frowning most fixedly at some one else. If

by any chance she raised her eyes to meet his, he immediately set about pinching or tickling the youngster nearest to him, just to demonstrate how completely his thoughts were occupied by other matters. He drew no little post-prayerful punishment upon himself in this way.

After the devotions, coffee was served, with little loaves of sweetened bread, while the women chatted, and Don Marcial recited *Las Golondrinas* unless forcibly restrained. Don Jaime usually joined the gathering at this time, and often invited the men into his studio for a goodnight *copita*.

On the ninth and last night the *nacimiento* was especially resplendent. Missing oranges and pieces of chocolate had been replaced by fresh decorations, for the children had been making sad inroads on the original supply from time to time as opportunity offered. The piece of paper which had covered that part of the framed picture showing the Babe was ceremoniously removed on the return from the quest for lodgings, in token of the Birth. As the singers wound up before Doña Josefa's house, they were gladly admitted and carried the picture to the living-room, placing it in the shrine which the boys had built in the form of a stable at the very top of the *nacimiento*.

Desiderio missed most of the Christmas-eve merrymaking this year. Señor Ramírez had arrived during the day and he and Mónico González remained with Don Jaime while the others made the final pilgrimage. When the wayfarers returned, the boy's father summoned him. He supposed he was to be sent on an errand, but when he reached the studio, Don Jaime bade him sit.

"Lello," he began, "you remember I told you that next summer you might go out again with the soldiers?"

The boy nodded.

"I have been asked to let you go out before then. Mónico

wants you to accompany him on a special mission he has just decided to undertake."

"You mean . . . go with the army?"

"Well, with one detachment."

"As a flag boy again?"

Mónico laughed.

"Not at all. As a regular soldier. In fact, the General has learned about your talents and he particularly desires that you acquire practice in drawing maps in the field. Of course, you will need to have a few more years before we can do anything definite about that, but on this particular expedition we are going to San Antonio del Mezquital, and since you are so familiar with all that country, you might be of assistance."

Desiderio flushed.

"Certainly . . . but . . . but . . . mama . . ."

"That is going to be arranged," his father interrupted. "This is one time when I am going to have my way." He lighted a cigarette absently. "I tell you, Lello, I suppose there are many who would censure me for letting you go. But you are nearly a man in years; you are more than a man in talents, in some of them, that is. You will have to learn certain things soon, and what I think is that it cannot harm you to learn them now."

"Why make so many turns when the road is so straight, maistro?" Mónico asked abruptly. "As a matter of fact, I have not told you my real reason for wanting the boy with me. It is not because he can draw or knows the country. Hear me. In the camp he told me about my brothers." His swart features darkened. "There has not been a minute when the thought of it left me. But I could not find out where El Tejocote had gone. Now he is to resume command of his old district at San Antonio. I can slip in there and

capture him for my own ends. The boy saw what happened to my brothers. I want him with me so that he can see whether or not I exact vengeance. That's the pure truth of it."

"What surprises me," Don Jaime broke in thoughtfully, "is why you do not let Juan handle this matter. In this instance the affair has nothing to do with the army, and, after all, he is older than . . ."

"With permission, *maistro*, I have my own reasons," Mónico replied with a quick frown that was almost a scowl. "Juan understands them. He has agreed to let this be my affair. That has all been well decided long since."

"Will I go with Toribio and the others?" Desiderio inquired.

"They are in my column now, ever since my General Arizpe gave me Tejada's command."

"I want to go very much. I wanted to stay in the army before. But my mother . . ."

"Then it is all well settled. I'll attend to that part of it. And you run back now, Lello. Not a word of this to any one, until I myself have a talk with your mother."

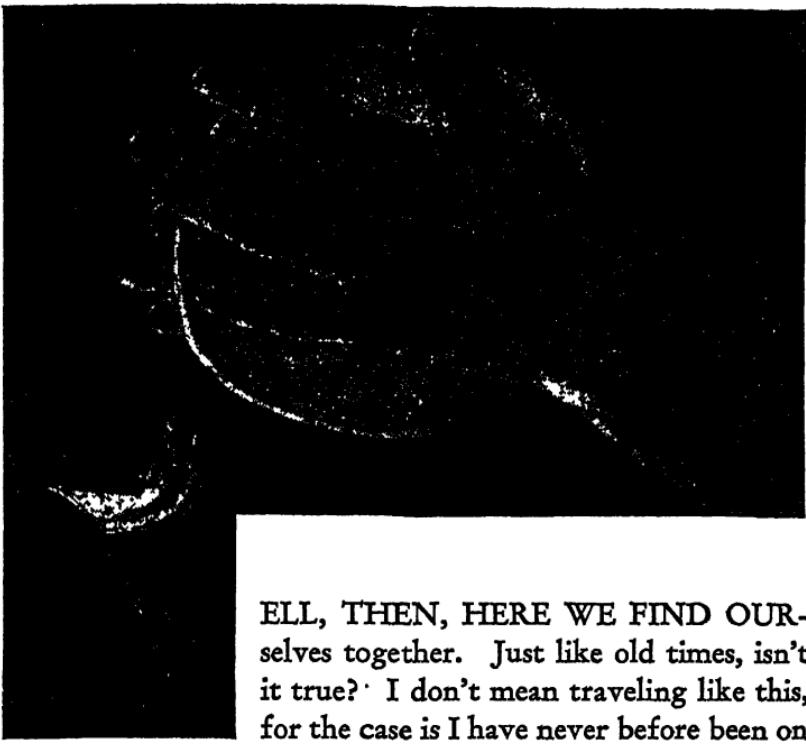
But Desiderio could not rejoin the other children and play at parlor games, knowing that within a few days he would once more be out with the army. Not as a flag boy, either. Mónico had said it in so many words.

He went into the patio; into the night through which, an hour or so ago, he had carried a candle, going from house to house, singing a plaintive request for lodgings for the Holy Pair. This time he would have a rifle and ammunition bandoliers, he told himself as he stretched out upon the ground so that he could look up at the stars. These became the uncountable glows of smoldering campfires as he watched, and he could hear the exaltation of El Perico's

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voice as that zealot expounded the holy cause of the humble, who had arisen to destroy their oppressors, who had cast off the burdens they had borne meekly for centuries, who were drenching with heroic blood the sacred soil of the father-land to achieve the rights tyrants sought vainly to deny.





ELL, THEN, HERE WE FIND OUR-selves together. Just like old times, isn't it true? I don't mean traveling like this, for the case is I have never before been on a train, so naturally that part of it is not like old times. Even the men with Villa himself do not have it any better than this, you may be sure."

Desiderio looked at Toribio and grinned.

"I have been on the train before," he boasted. "We came to Durango this same way, a long time ago. Only we were not on top of the cars, like we are now. They were different cars, too, cars with benches inside, where we sat and looked out through the windows. You can see much better from up here, though."

Toribio hitched to a more comfortable position, shifting the saddle against which he was propped.

"This is style," he observed complacently. "That Prieto, he's a good one. He knows how things ought to be done. On a train! Imagine!"

Desiderio looked about, as best he could, for the tops of

the two cattle-cars were uncomfortably crowded. There were some fifty soldiers, and the usual motley rout of women and children, not to mention half a dozen goats, though a plaintive bleating from below bore eloquent witness to the fact that not many of these animals had found their way to the roof. Nets of chicken wire had been stretched from beam to beam beneath the cars, and most of the contingent's goats, securely trussed, had been tossed into these hammocks in spite of vigorous protest on their part. From within the slatted cattle-cars came the restless pawing and stamping of horses.

To bring all this confusion still closer to the verge of utter chaos, each of the men had his saddle, his rifle, and his blankets with him on top of the car, and each of the women had already lighted a fire on a scrap of sheet-iron, and was cooking as unconcernedly as though the camp were pitched on some familiar hillside. The train journey would be ended by noon, at which time the men would ride off alone. Knowing this, the soldieresses were preparing a plentiful supply of *gordas*—unusually thick *tortillas*—to be split open and stuffed with a filling of beans and chiles. None of the women wanted to bring upon herself the shame of having failed to provide at least two days' rations for her man.

It was not easy to grind the boiled corn on the tops of the lurching and jolting cars, with cinders and sparks flying all about. But heedless of the difficulties, the *soldaderas* passed their stone rolling-pins back and forth over three-legged grinding plates of thick volcanic rock, back and forth, back and forth, until the corn had been reduced to a smooth, thick paste which could be patted into proper shape and consistency. Daylight, creeping cautiously over the earth's eastern rim, shepherded the stars out of the sky.

"No more than look at that Choncha of mine, how she

"works," Toribio exulted. "Isn't she the pure fine one? I told you I would get a girl when we took Durango. A good thing I did, too, because Chato is not with us. But do not worry. Choncha and I will take good care of you."

"Perico isn't with us either, is he?"

"That son of a smuttiness! Of course he is here. He is up there on the *trompa*, those iron teeth the engine has in front. That must be dangerous, isn't it true? I mean if the train hits something, then you are naturally the first to be hit yourself if you are up there."

Choncha, Toribio's dumpy little wife, thrust a hot *gorda* at Desiderio, and he munched it happily, for despite the noise and the cinders he was enjoying himself very much. New places to see! And to think of riding into the old village as a full-fledged soldier, a rifle across the pommel, cartridge belts slung over the saddle-horn. How Esteban and Pablo and Mateo and Andrés and all the other boys would stare!

The sun had risen high in the heavens and still the train jolted along its appointed way through a precipitous defile with mountains rising high on either side, crossing a wooden trestle over a dry arroyo now and again, an endless spread of mezquite stretching away where the mountains receded. The constant rain of cinders made those on top of the two cars feel gritty and uncomfortable. None the less they were sorry when the train jerked to a halt beside the cattle-chutes of the stone station at Catalina. It had been such a nice ride.

A switch track, a row of single-story hovels some distance back from the right of way, and the cattle-pens were the only features which distinguished Catalina from the otherwise unbroken monotony of the *mezquital*. A dusty highroad ribboned away to the northeast over an apparently endless slope, gently ascending to meet the far horizon.

Mónico González was the first to leap to the ground when the train stopped. He embraced a swarthy man, bearded like St. Francis. After a brief conference with his brother, Mónico turned to the soldiers.

"Be ready to leave in two hours, boys," he directed. "We are in for a long ride."

The cattle-cars had been spotted directly opposite the two whitewashed chutes of the station pens. When the doors were opened men on the opposite side of the tracks began to yell, wave their hats, throw stones and raise a clamorous din generally. Frightened, the horses stampeded down the chutes, milling about in the pens until their masters finally released them from the uproar, and led them to water at the railroad tank. Lightly hobbled with the short hair loop which each soldier carried as part of his equipment, the horses were saddled and turned loose to graze.

Meanwhile the women transferred to the ground their pots and even the cooking fires themselves, to complete the preparation of a noonday meal. Momentarily the bustle increased. Men examined the hoofs of their mounts, shouted for missing blankets, shifted cartridge belts from their shoulders to the saddle-horn, ran to the water tank to fill gourd canteens, or, more foresighted still, stowed full bottles of *rompope* \* in their saddlebags.

Not until mid-afternoon did the haphazard procession finally get under way. They straggled along the highroad which undulated off into the distance and was turned down over the world's edge at the horizon like a long tape tucked under a seam. The howling tumult that preceded their departure was suddenly stilled. There were no sounds but the occasional jingle of spurs or other metal accouterments,

\* *Rompope* is a well-shaken mixture of aguardiente and raw eggs. No Mexican embarks on a long journey without this viaticum if he can help it.

and the slow creak of saddle leather. Now and again a cock quail would call across the *mezquital* in two sparkling notes which only served to accent the pervading stillness. At intervals there would come a harsh whirr, as though a vibrator had been set off deep in a bed of crisp, dry leaves, and that would be a rattlesnake whose warning always sent the nearest horses into a fit of plunging and rearing.

But there was no talk. Even that tireless conversationalist, Toribio, refrained from speech until after they had reached the sink of El Berjel, where a bubbling spring spread its water from the rocks of its origin over the adjacent mud-flats.

The men dismounted and unsaddled. Two of them built a fire of sticks gathered in the grove that surrounded the spring, and began to boil coffee for the whole detachment. Horses were hobbled for the night and groomed to see that they had picked up no stones on the march. Stretching away for league upon league, a low wall of dry boulders followed the dips and rises of the terrain. Daylight faded swiftly as the men munched their *tacos* and drank coffee.

Desiderio and Toribio found places side by side on the stone fence, the latter smoking a husk cigarette. It is an old saying that a corn-husk cigarette has never learned to talk. This is because it is hard to keep alight, and if one stops puffing to engage in conversation, the fire goes out. Besides, speech sounded so incongruous in a world so hushed, and under a sky so thickly dusted with stars there was not room for them all, and every now and again one was jostled out of the firmament into the black void, trailing a brief flash of greenish flame ere it vanished.

Little owls, who had stood sentry at the entrances to their burrows when the detachment trooped up to the camp ground, puffed by on downy and noiseless wings, foraging

for the small creatures of the wild on which they preyed. Big mud turtles, disturbed in their customary solitude by the intrusion of visitors, splashed back into the water from their logs in sluggish disapproval. Some one was blowing minor chords softly on a mouth-organ, and a number of high-pitched falsetto voices took up the doleful strains of the song about the bird-girl, who lived alone in the wilds. Only one voice sang the words:

*Ya lo sabes que soy pajarera  
Que en los campos me vivo gozando,  
Disfrutando de la primavera,  
De los aves sus púlidos cantos.*

Withdrawn from the others, Mónico and Juan González were deep in conversation, their voices pitched low, not because what they said was of a confidential nature, but simply because loud talk would have seemed so grossly out of place.

“ . . . and I tell you, Mónico, the way to do this is not at the village. From where we are now, we can reach the *bacienda* of the Zaragozas at sundown, and El Tejocote will be there tomorrow night.”

“ Suppose he doesn’t come? Then we have gone a great distance out of our road and lost a day for nothing.”

“ But he will come. She has sent him word. This Tranquilino who will join us at sundown tomorrow is her messenger. El Tejocote is to meet her at moonrise by the stream bank, just above the dam, where there is a big weeping willow tree. And remember, there are but ten soldiers at the ranch. No one expects anything in this part of the country, for what difference does it make who holds these hills?”

“ None the less, he was stationed at San Antonio again,

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wasn't he? I think the case is they are sending out hundreds of small detachments to villages and ranches in the north, and that on a given day these are to unite into one army and fall upon us from the direction of the north, when we are all looking to be attacked from the south, where the main army is supposed to be."

"What folly! He has probably been sent up here to convoy a shipment of silver from one of the mines. And in any event, there are still but ten soldiers at the *hacienda*, and the time to attack them is just at nightfall, when they can be overcome without firing even so much as one single shot. Look! Two men of the ten go to water and wash the horses. Four others go down to the dam to cut grass for feed. The only ones at the front of the house as you approach by road are the sergeant and the two men washing the horses. It will be like opening and shutting your eyes. You know there is a low hill in front of the big house, not a quarter of a league away. We leave here at daybreak and make a large circle. Once we are on the other side of this hill they will be unable even to see the dust we raise. Our men dismount and crawl up to the crest, and make the charge from there."

"No, Juanito, wait a moment. I would suggest a better plan. We will leave the men there on the hill, back of the crest, and you and I alone will ride up to the ranch openly along the road. If things are as you say, there will be none to see us but the sergeant and the two men washing the horses. We ride up like travelers, seeking shelter for the night, quite openly, and the sergeant will hardly look at us in order to impress upon us how important he is. You take the two men washing the horses, covering them with your gun, and I leap up into the portico and herd the sergeant down to you so that you can guard all three. Then

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I run around to the back and capture their stacked rifles before any one knows what has taken place. Once we are in possession of the ranch, Don Guillermo cannot but do what we ask, and there you are."

"That is a better plan than mine, little brother."

"And what you said about the dress is a good idea. He will never suspect it, in the dark. And mama will be happy at last and at last."

"Yes, this may be our only opportunity to set her poor, sick mind at rest, if it is not already too late."

"You have seen her?"

"Some three months ago. I slipped in one night. El Tejocote was not there at the time. He has only recently come back, you know."

"Yes, I was told. That is when I sent you the message."

"She did not know me, I think. Her mind is broken. She has brooded so much over what happened that there is no room for anything else. This might restore her."

"May God be served! But whether or not it does, our little brothers will sleep the better. Those who saw them put to the torture will likewise see the retribution. By the way, Beatriz asked me to convey to you her greetings."

"Where is she now?"

"At the hotel where we live."

"It will seem like a miracle, when this is all over and we settle down at home again with our families, and tend our sheep, and continue the weaving, eh, little brother?"

"If it ever is all over. I begin to doubt that it is coming to an end. Here we are all trying to fight against Huerta, and they say there is bad blood between us already, that my General Villa is no longer content to acknowledge Carranza as First Chief, claiming that Carranza is keeping him back

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from Mexico and will not give him coal for his trains, what do I know? They say Carranza wants Obregón to take Mexico. Perhaps my General Villa wants to make himself president. It is all very mixed up, only God knows how it is all to end."





IVING THEIR MOUNTS THE SPUR, the men raced down the short slope to the ranch-house the moment they heard the shot. This had been merely the prearranged signal for their advance. It was all over by the time they arrived. The sergeant and his men, taken completely by surprise, had surrendered. He and his soldiers were locked in a vacant room in one of the long *viviendas*, and their rifles and ammunition were ready to be packed for transportation.

"Get something to eat, boys, but keep yourselves ready," Mónico González directed. "There is still much work to do tonight. You five over here keep a lookout in front of the house, just in case a party of federals should come from San Antonio."

He spoke from the raised gallery which encircled the residence floor of the *casa grande* and, with the last words, he turned to find that Don Guillermo had stepped into the open from one of the chambers.

"It is well you are here," he told the landowner gravely. "You see for yourself we have taken the ranch."

"And may I ask, Señor Coronel . . .?"

"Mónico González, to serve you."

". . . what you propose to do?"

"That depends upon yourself, Don Guillermo. We have

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not come to pillage or to kill. I have but one request to make, and if that is granted we will leave you in peace and untroubled, except for the bit of corn and beans to feed our men and horses."

"May I offer you some refreshment in the meantime? A drink of something, perhaps?"

"Thank you. In a few moments. You have not yet learned what I ask."

Don Guillermo, very erect, maintaining an air of aloof reserve toward a commoner, shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference can it possibly make?" he inquired.  
"Am I in a position to dictate terms, or even to protest?"

"As long as you regard the matter in that light, Don Guillermo, I accept no hospitality at your hands. Then good. Let me make myself plain. Within the room there I have just glimpsed your wife, Doña Concepción. I want the dress she is wearing."

"Señor!"

"I remind you that you yourself, but a moment ago, have said you are not in a position to dictate terms. I now insist. It is not a heavy price to pay for the safety of the ranch."

"But such a request, Colonel! Though I make no pretense of understanding what is afoot, would it not serve as well if I sent you one of the lady's other dresses, without placing myself in the position of asking her to change her apparel at your demand?"

"I do not argue. I am not saying it is reasonable. I am not saying it is courteous. Then good. But I do say it must be the dress your señora wife now wears and no other. Your soldier guard is captive. I now rejoin my men. Send me the dress at once."

Spurs clinking, he made his way down the steps to the

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ground-level, where Juan and the five sentries, Desiderio among them, awaited him.

"Are the others getting food?" he asked.

"Assuredly," chuckled Juan. "How not? And flirting with the women and having a gay time generally. They had good horses, the federals who guarded this place. We must not neglect to take them with us when we depart."

"Better send men up and down the road to stand guard, as soon as they have eaten. It is just possible he might come here openly with an escort, and try to slip out later for his meeting."

"It can do no harm to be prepared for emergencies, though Tranquilino asserts he always comes alone on these excursions."

"Imagine it! Alone! After all, no more than that is needed, little brother."

"Don't wrinkle yourself, old skin, I need you for a drum," Juan admonished him indulgently. "Do not irritate yourself about it. Remember what we have to do."

"I will be careful. But it is hard to wait, Juanito. How many hours is it now?"

"Three or four at the most."

"I wish it were already the right moment. I wish it were already over. I wish it was the case that we had him here where . . ."

"The time will come soon enough, little brother. Calm mountains, singing birds."

"It is strange, though, how things become different. Do you remember the time when we got the *santita* for our mother, how she treasured it?"

"She still does. I saw it the last time I was at home."

"But I want to say . . . we were poor then, so poor we had not even money to pay for it. And now we have

money. The General makes me a very liberal allowance on the horse feed. Beatriz and little Tereso and I live in the hotel and want for nothing. You know, a fine city hotel. It was the revolution that did it . . . and yet, when I think of our two brothers that were strung up by the misbegotten foulness for whom we wait tonight, and when I think of our poor mama . . . sometimes I do not know . . . it would have been much, much better for all of us . . .”

“I do not trouble myself about such questions, about would this have been better, would that have been better. Who can do anything about what would have been? What is past is past, and so ends the story. All that belongs to us is the power to do with what is, and what is to be.”

Don Guillermo’s voice came to them from the gallery.

“Señor Coronel?”

“Command me.”

“A package for you.”

Mónico took the gallery steps in two strides.

“I extend my thanks, Don Guillermo.”

“And I do not accept them. What I deliver to you is something surrendered, not something freely given.”

“No matter, we shall not quarrel over words.”

“We shall not quarrel in any event.”

“In that case, you need trouble no further. The ranch will not be molested. That is all. You have permission to go.”

“Permission! Ah, if . . .”

“That is all. Very good nights to you.”

Sentries were posted along the roads while those who had stood guard during supper partook of the inevitable beans and stewed meat which had been prepared by the women of the workmen’s quarters behind the big house. The usual haphazard encampment was pitched within the walled area

of the *bacienda*, and here Mónico summoned to the firelight one Manuel Bermejo, a slender youth who was, next to Desiderio, the smallest man in the detachment.

"Would it not be better to wait, little brother?" suggested Juan González.

"No, I am afraid we might be too late, as it is," Mónico replied impatiently. "He will surely be here ahead of the time, to await the proper minute, and to spy around first to make sure he is not observed, and that all is quiet. We have not a moment to lose, in fact. Come, Tranquilino, show us the place."

They made their way cautiously down the long, grassy slope of a pasture to a point above the dam where a large weeping willow stood by the stream bank, the only tree in a little lunette of a clearing hemmed in on all sides by the dense *mezquital*.

"He will come along that path from the hill," the guide explained.

"And we will be hidden everywhere else. Perico, when he has passed, you step softly into the path behind him, so as to close it, in case he turns to flee. The rest of you will be placed about the edge of the clearing, where I put you. Now remember, not a shot. I want this *cabrón* alive and unhurt. Manuel, come here."

He handed the boy the package Don Guillermo had given him.

"Put on this white dress, lad, and sit here on the bank beneath the willow. Face the water and no matter what happens do not turn around. Do not even tremble. If you feel arms about you, catch him and hang on. But don't turn your head, no matter what you hear. Be stricken deaf. The rest of you remain unmoving where I put you. When you hear me give the signal, rush. Overpower him. And

## THE WEDGE

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that is all. Now you, Toribio, over here. Chico, behind this shrub. No smoking, no talking. Fruto, you over here. Lello . . ."

Desiderio lay in his hiding-place for what seemed to be an eternity, his eyes glued to the dim figure in the ruffled white dress, just barely perceptible beneath the lithely pendent twigs of the weeping willow as these stirred and swayed faintly in the light breeze.

Yet the night seemed full of noises. There was always the muffledplash of water passing over the dam and the purl of the churning rapids below. From somewhere beyond the neighboring hills came the occasional sharp and nervous yapping of a coyote. Small animals seemed to be scuttling all about. He could not relax. Every muscle in his body was tense, and when a dark, slender figure moved noiselessly into the open glade from the shadows of the hillside path, Desiderio's heart began to thump so loudly he was afraid the sound must be audible to every one. He felt as though its beats were shaking his whole body to and fro.

El Tejocote stood motionless for long minutes before he stepped out of the beaten path and to one side; and now Desiderio wanted to expel all the pent breath in his breast in one great shout, for he knew El Perico must have slipped into the path from the scrub which bordered it, and that the officer was already trapped. Yet, all unconscious of the wild absurdity of coltish play with twenty pairs of hostile eyes to watch, El Tejocote stooped to pluck a grass blade before tiptoeing over the sward to the figure in white, seated beneath the weeping willow and facing the stream. The moon had risen above the treetops and was beginning to flood the glade with a pale illumination which threw everything into a bold relief of contrasting light and shadow. Even Desiderio sensed the mad incongruity of what the

officer was about, as the latter leaned cautiously forward to tickle the back of Manuel Bermejo's neck with the point of a grass blade, only to catch that slender youth in his arms as the latter twitched involuntarily under the tickling contact.

But there was no further time for thought.

*"Hora, muchachos!"*

Mónico had given the word. The rest was a swift blur of converging figures, a momentary glimpse of writhing bodies, and then, startlingly distinct, the labored sound of heavy breathing.

"It is finished; do not harm him on any account," Mónico González warned them sharply. "Tie his hands well. Tie them behind his back, put him on his feet, and bring him along to the house."

"No sooner said than done," grunted El Perico, bending over the prostrate figure. "Pull his wrists together, there. And thus we have another of those who have drenched the soil of the fatherland with the blood of who knows how many innocents. And what now, Prieto? I can think of many ways in which he can be made to pay, and pay well, so that the dawn would find him not yet dead, but still suffering the agony he has . . ."

"Nothing more!" Mónico admonished him. "Bring him quietly to the house. We leave at daybreak." He turned to confront the bound officer. "I am Mónico González," he said simply. "Tomorrow we go to San Antonio to present you to my mother."

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*"Is the chocolate prepared to your liking, my dear?"*

*"Yes, quite, thank you."*

*"I hope you rested well."*

"How not? There was surprisingly little disturbance."

"I thought perhaps their departure might have awakened you."

"They are gone?"

"Yes, they left just at daybreak. They were noisy enough about it. That is what roused me. I went out to see what was going on."

"Then we have nothing more to fear. That is, unless they should come back."

"They will not return."

"Why, that is splendid! But was it not strange? Not at all like the way Rafael always said the revolutionists acted."

"True, indeed! This was quite different."

"And I worried so last night. I could not but think how terrible it would be if Rafael were to come with some of his soldiers and there would be a battle and shooting . . . and then I thought how different it all would have been if he had been here with his men when those bandits arrived, how he would have driven them all away . . ."

"But, my dear, what put it into your pretty head that he might come last night? Had he sent you any word?"

"Don't be absurd, Guillermo; of course not. I should have told you at once if he had. It was just one of the things that flashed through my mind. You can scarcely marvel to think I was nervous under the circumstances, and that I imagined all sorts of things. Is that so very astonishing?"

"No. The astonishing thing is that as a matter of fact Coronel De la O did visit the ranch last night."

## THE WEDGE

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"Guillermo . . . Guillermo . . . what are you saying?  
Guillermo . . . you must not look at me like . . ."

"Do keep your chair, dear one. These theatricals no longer impress me."

"What do you want to say? What has happened?"

"Nothing, save that Coronel De la O did visit the ranch last night, as I told you, and that he was expected . . . they knew in advance he would come . . . they were waiting for him . . ."

"A lie!"

"So I myself should have said had I not seen him when they rode off this morning. I wonder whether it was an ill chance or a fortunate one that the bustle of their departure awakened me. Otherwise I would assuredly have known nothing of it."

"Mary the Purest One! You saw him?"

"Quite plainly. His hands were tied behind his back and his head was held low, but when I called to him he looked up."

"He was hurt? Wounded, perhaps?"

"Spare yourself any anxiety. He was not hurt, but he could not meet my eyes. I called his name, and he looked up. Then he saw it was I, and his glance fell. I wonder he recognized me, for something had died . . . he was looking at a corpse when he saw me . . ."

"You do not know what you say, Guillermo."

"I got the whole story out of one of the stragglers . . . for a peso. Droll enough! Cheap, too. Only one piece of silver for this betrayal—with a kiss. That dress they made me give them last night, they put it on one of the men, they . . ."

"Stop! It is a lie!"

"I can confirm it from any of the laborers on my

## THE WEDGE

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ranch, if you wish. There is probably not a sweaty peasant or stinking stable hand who does not know by this time how Rafael De la O was trapped by the dress of my wife. In the hillside hovels the old women will tell the story over their tortilla making. There will be street songs about how El Tejocote was caught with the dress that belonged to the wife of Guillermo Zaragoza."

"Guillermo! Guillermo, let me speak! It is not true, what they said. They have lied to you! You must not . . . Guillermo, put down that knife . . . Guillermo, do not come near me, do you hear . . . our child . . ."

"Ha-ha-ha! Why, that is the very peak of the jest . . . what they will be saying of our child . . ."

"Guillermo, for the love of God . . . do you not remember how . . . Guillermo! Don't . . . don't . . . Ahhh! . . . Why, I thought . . . it would hurt more . . . than this . . . My darling, I did not dream you . . . loved me . . . like this . . . Guillermo . . . Gui . . ."

"I do love you, heart. That is why there was no other way. I shall join you in this moment . . . do not be frightened, beloved, . . . here . . . at the feet of my lady . . ."

They were in sight of the old family cornfield Desiderio had guarded as a boy when Mónico González ordered a halt. But at this season of the year there were no growing crops to be guarded, and no children, by consequence, to wait with *patoles* to have El Juipi bring them news from the ends of the earth. Desiderio felt the burden of years as he relaxed in the saddle, a rifle before him, two cartridge belts slung from the horn. He thought to himself: When I saw that clay bank over there in those days, I would say it was a

good place to slide down; now I am thinking that it is a place where a man might be hidden to shoot at me.

"Untie his hands," Mónico directed.

The command was obeyed, and El Tejocote rubbed his wrists, looking down at the saddle-horn. Only his head was bowed, however. His back was as erect as though he were riding review.

"Write me a note to the *jefe* you left in charge in your absence and tell him to evacuate the town," said Mónico.

The prisoner gave no sign that he had heard. He sat there and rubbed the heel of his right palm against the red abrasion on his left wrist.

"Tell them we will wait until an hour before sundown," Mónico went on, "and that the town must be evacuated by then. Tell them we are here in superior numbers. Tell them your safety depends on their compliance with this demand. Tell them anything you please that will convince them. Make it very emphatic."

Silently, and without raising his head, El Tejocote extended his hand for the pencil and the tightly rolled bundle of loose sheets of memorandum paper which Mónico took from his saddlebag and held out toward him. Still silently he wrote, slipped out the scribbled leaf, and passed everything back.

"You carry it in, Tranquilino. They know you and are used to seeing you go back and forth. Deliver it yourself and bring me back the reply. Dismount, boys. Dismount and rest. Tie him up once more, Perico, when he gets off the horse."

The afternoon wore away drowsily. Desiderio lay back and looked at Cerro de la Plata's flat crest, and thought of that other time when he had ridden from this spot to the village, and the scolding and the walk that had followed.

A bumblebee droned close by him, and he did not wince. He thought: Truly, I have grown up, and now coming back here is like seeing a new place. I used to be very much afraid of bumblebees, and now they do not frighten me . . . *Juipi, Juipi, which end of the world did you visit today?* . . . now it is all changed, for I have traveled so far beyond what used to be the end of the world. I am a man.

And he thought how sunken and gray the features of proud Don Guillermo had looked when he leaned over the rail of the balcony, staring at El Tejocote in the pallid dawn. That was like seeing a new place, too, to see a face with that expression on it, so different from the faces of the men through whose jaws El Tejocote had strung a rope-threaded bayonet, men whose eyeballs had rolled backward until only a slim, reversed crescent of white showed between the bronze of the lids for an instant before the eyes were squeezed shut in agony. And yet there had been something in Don Guillermo's expression which had called those same tortured faces to mind.

He thought: I have seen many new places since the last time I was at this *barbecho*, more new places than Juipi will ever see. The things that hurt people are different. When I was here before, a spanking made me howl. Now I would not mind spankings, they would be nothing. They would not be nearly as bad as a black look or a hard word from some of the men around me. I must go on and on. There must always be new places to see. *Ab, I am navigating along with life until death shall have come.*

Then it was almost sundown, and the quarry at the foot of Cerro de la Plata was turning into a deep pool of green-blue twilight, just as it used to do. They rode along the well-remembered road into the village in the fading light,

which lingered on as though day were loth to leave so pleasant an abiding-place.

Doña Mónica's eyes remained blank when her sons embraced her and kissed her wrinkled cheeks, but they flamed into life when El Tejocote, bound, was led before her. They remained alive when he was thrown down upon the ground by El Perico, so that his head rested upon the stone curbing and his body lay in the street. Without a word she picked up a rock, as heavy a rock as she could lift, and brought it down upon the prostrate officer's temple.

But she was too weak. She could only inflict pain. Her veiny old arms could not lift the stone high enough even to stun the bound man. Squatting beside him, El Perico watched with shining eyes, and when El Tejocote began at length to scream, he seemed to drink in the sounds with a sort of voluptuous ecstasy. Then Mónico took the rock away from his mother and cut off the harsh screams in the middle of a cry. The sound that marked the blow was dull and pulpy, as when an overripe peach falls to the sun-baked ground of the orchard.

Desiderio saw the skinny hand of Doña Mónica extended, its fingers reflexed like poised talons. He saw a convulsive spasm twitch the inert form that had been El Tejocote as the claw-like fingers probed in what looked like a pink slime. He turned his head to shut out the rest of the picture, though he could not lock his ears against the old woman's shrill "Blessed be God!" and the wet splatter which punctuated it. Doña Mónica began to recite an *Our Father* as though she were telling her beads, and at intervals there would come another flat, slapping sound, as though a wet cloth had been dropped to a stone floor.





IDSUMMER HAD COME, SCHOOL

had been over nearly a month, and still

Desiderio remained at home. The old restlessness had grown stronger within him, and his mind was a curious jumble of new whims. The one-time sensitiveness which had made the mere presence of his mother or sister something akin to torment had passed away, but there persisted in him the itch to see a new place, live through a new experience, surrender to the charm of something completely outside of ordinary routine.

The informal delights of squatting about a fire in the deepening dusk, munching camp food and listening to the robust bawdries of soldier speech were still vivid in his memory. Running helter-skelter through this tangle of ideas was the half-remembered skein of his father's crusading homilies on the revolution as an emancipating force that would regenerate Mexico.

All this ferment was at work in his mind while he toiled on a pencil sketch of his father as the latter meticulously applied gold leaf to the flaming halo that surrounded the Sacred Heart of a small figure of the Saviour. Then Mónico González came bursting into the studio.

"Have you heard the news, *maestro?*" he asked excitedly.  
"What news?"

"Obregón has captured Guadalajara, and they say Mier is in full retreat to the south."

"Hai, that is news indeed," said Don Jaime, laying down his small brush, and the book of fine sheets of gold leaf.  
"That is the beginning of the end, if it is true."

"Indeed, it looks like it. That is what brought me over here. I have papers which must go at once to San Antonio, and I want to send them by Desiderio. He knows the road and he knows the village."

The boy's eyes sparkled.

"All by myself?" he asked.

"Well then, you'll have lots of company as far as Catalina, of course, because you'll be going there by train, and the trains are pretty well crowded. But from Catalina on you will be by yourself. Do not worry, though. There will be nothing to bother you, you may be sure."

"I am not afraid," Desiderio protested hastily. "I am glad it is to be by myself. Where are the papers?"

"Calm mountains, singing birds," Mónico quoted, smiling. "When I said at once, I did not mean this minute. Day after tomorrow you will leave by the regular morning train."

"Not a military train?"

"Not this time. I believe there is to be one car of soldiers who are being sent to Mapimí, but you will not be with them."

"I will be ready. That is, if my mother . . ."

"Your mother," Don Jaime interrupted, "will understand that this is a special mission and that you are not going out to fight. As a matter of fact, she will probably give you mountains of letters and other things for her friends in the

village. But tell me, Mónico, where did you hear the news about Guadalajara?"

"A telegram came for my General Arizpe this morning from Carranza in Chihuahua. Nothing can turn us from victory now, eh? Villa is in Zacatecas, but that was all settled when he took Torreón and got control of all the railroads of the north. It has been one victory after another."

"Yes, this is the beginning of the end," agreed the sculptor. "Huerta cannot hold out now. I have said it before and I say it again, no man is big enough to stop the revolution. Look, no more than look, what Huerta tried, what expedients he resorted to. Terrorism, an embroilment with the United States of the North—the same kind of scarecrow Iturbide had tried to set up a hundred years ago when his dictatorship fell and he concocted his yarn about the plots of the Holy Alliance. And now, as a last resort, Huerta is trying to stir up religious hatred by proclaiming the revolution is against the Church, that priests are being murdered and . . . ."

Mónico González chuckled.

"They were not really priests, you know," he reminded Don Jaime. "Like the time when we took Durango. A lot of the rich members of the *defensa social* were caught in the city. Many of them hid, but others tried to disguise themselves as priests by cutting off their mustaches and shaving a *corona* on the tops of their heads, putting on the black robe and all. Whenever we caught them, they were executed, and I suppose a lot of onlookers might have thought we were shooting down the priests."

"Perhaps there were some real priests, too, for many of them were so bitter against the revolution that they took up arms to fight against it. After all, one can hardly blame

them, in the light of the cry that went up for the nationalization of Church properties. Sometimes I hardly know which side to take myself. If the people are weaned away from the Church, what is to become of us poor makers of holy and miraculous images?"

Desiderio scarcely listened to the talk. He saw himself riding in state down the main street of the village; passing the night in solitude by the water-hole at El Berjel. His mother would supply him with food for the journey, perhaps even with a bottle of *rompope*.

"Where will I get a horse, Don Mónico?"

"A horse? What for?"

"For the ride from Catalina. You said I would go that far by train. Will I take my horse on the train with me, like the last time?"

"Oh, that. No, there will be a horse waiting for you at Catalina. You are to leave him there on your return. A special letter I will give you will arrange all that. You will be supplied at Catalina with a rifle and ammunition, too. You are not to go out as a soldier, however, but . . ."

There was a great outcry in the patio. Doña Josefa's voice was shrill with excitement.

"Chago, my little Chago, just look at him, no more than look at the boy! Imagine it, and I knew him when he was only so big. What a surprise! Come, come quickly! Come with me to the workshop this instant. My husband will be as proud to see you as I am."

With the last words she appeared in the open doorway, beaming and literally pulling behind her, by the hand, a handsome young priest. Even Desiderio was somewhat awed. It seemed unbelievable that he had ever hurled a derisive "*Joto! Joto! Joto!*" at this tall padre, robed in

flowing black with buttons in one unbroken line from neck-band to hem.

"Well, well, well! It's like a San Antonio reunion, isn't it, with all of us here from the old village, eh? I suppose we can't call you Chago any more. We will have to be respectful and address you as Padre Rojas. Sit down, man. You remember Don Mónico González?"

"When I knew him he was just a little boy like the other children," Mónico observed, smiling. "Just see what a difference a couple of years can make!"

"Would I be excommunicated if I offered you a drink?" Don Jaime inquired. "After all, I knew you when you were just a cherry tree."

"No, thank you, *maestro*," Chago replied. "But how a cherry tree?"

"Do you not know the story? I thought every one had heard that. A village once engaged a sculptor to make them a Nazarene, and every one in the community was supposed to donate something toward the cost of the image. One man, who could not give money, donated the wood of which the statue was carved. Well, the image became very holy and worked numberless miracles. The whole village gathered one day to do the Nazarene honor, and knelt before the image, all but the man who had donated the wood, who stood by, looking on. 'What ails you? Why don't you kneel with us? Have you no respect?' the other villagers asked him. He shrugged his shoulders. 'I can't help it,' he explained. 'I knew him when he was a cherry tree.' And that, to be sure, is how I knew Your Reverence."

There was a general laugh, in which even Chago joined. "But don't go to any trouble," he added. "I only came to pay my respects, and to bid you all farewell."

"Don't tell me you have been given a parish already!" exclaimed Don Jaime.

Chago's voice was deeper than it used to be, Desiderio thought sulkily, but it still retained a sort of cherishing, precious quality which he found definitely obnoxious. Moreover, he felt a curious sense of personal affront in all this fuss and to-do his parents were making about the visitor.

"Farewell!" cried Doña Josefa. "You will certainly make your home here in this house for a few days. Do you think I would dream of letting you go?"

"Why not stay here a time? You will be more than welcome," supplemented Don Jaime.

"But you do not understand. I am leaving to join the army."

"What's that?" It was Mónico González who rapped out the question.

"As a confessor, you understand. My uncle is with Villa and they are in Zacatecas now. I have written to him that I am coming."

"Oh, not you too, Chago. Not you too," lamented Doña Josefa, wringing her hands.

"How not? It is a duty some one must perform."

"I know, but you were always such a sweet, gentle boy; you do not know what it is. I can tell you it is not the thing a boy like you should do. Can I not speak? Did not one of my own sons, my own flesh and blood, run away from his home and his grieving parents and live amid the filth, the blood and the killing? Leave that to others, I say."

"But you do not understand, Doña Josefa. It is so hard to explain. I have lain awake night after night in my cubicle at the seminary, thinking of those poor men. They give up so much. They are so fine and so brave. They make

so many, many sacrifices. And to think! They are denied the consolation of the sacraments. It is surely enough that they should suffer in this world the mutilation of those splendid, magnificent bodies; their souls should not be damned in purgatory as well."

"Hmmm!" said Don Jaime.

"I tell you I have lain there and seen myself going about the battlefield, administering unction to those who are beyond all mortal aid. I have heard a voice that commanded me to do this. It is a call. I must go, I tell you."

"I wonder if you realize just what you will be giving up?" asked Don Jaime. He smiled teasingly. "After all, a priest as young and as good-looking as yourself, you would have a parish inside of a year, you know that, true? And all the richest women would select you as their confessor, not only the young and pretty ones, but the old ones too. Most specially the old ones. They would shower you with gifts, and make much of you. Your church would be one of the very biggest ones, with the best attendance. The lucky priests are those of two groups: the old and gentle ones who have acquired wisdom, and the young and handsome ones like yourself. That is something worth bearing well in mind."

"All that is nothing, Don Jaime. I can think of no more than how terrible it is for those poor men to go down into the grave unshaven, doomed to torment. Those fine, beautiful bodies, torn and marred, writhing in the death throes, it is bad enough for them to be lost, but not their souls, too. And I am young and strong, I can stand the hardships and rigors of the campaign; it is not right that some old and feeble men should be the ones to whom this work is left. It is a duty that has been laid upon me."

"And how about Villa? What will he think of it? You

know he does not like priests. They say that when he captures a village he subjects all the priests to frightful indignities."

"I do not believe that, but I shall not flinch from martyrdom, if that is what God in His infinite wisdom has decreed for me. Villa is a good man, and I think those stories are greatly exaggerated. Many of his men are the most devout Catholics. Surely he would never deny to them the consolations held out by their faith."

"You may be right, of course. There is always a great deal of idle talk about such things. But, none the less . . . why, they say that in one little village he took, there was a single priest who refused to leave. Villa had him brought before him and asked him why he did not flee with the others. The priest told him bluntly he was not afraid of a Villa, and this tickled him so that he clapped the padre on the shoulder and told him he would make him a bishop. The priest was shocked and said only the Pope could make him a bishop. But that was all one to Villa. He forced him to don a bishop's robes and a miter, and made all the churches in the vicinity acknowledge him as bishop."

"No matter, it is all arranged. I go to join my uncle, the general."

"But I cannot bear to see you go like that, my darling boy," exclaimed Doña Josefa. "It seems so wrong, when you have just become a priest . . . and such a good-looking one, too!"

"Indeed, it grieves me that you cannot see it with my eyes," replied Chago, rising; "but it has made me so happy to meet you once more. Be with God, señores. Until we see each other!"

"May God guard you! May God bear you well along a good road! Go with God, dearest boy!" the adults echoed.

## T H E W E D G E

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The young priest shook hands with all of them and embraced them individually, even Desiderio, as he took his departure.

"I remember how he used to call me his *geranito*," wailed Doña Josefa, weeping. "Such a lovely geranium cutting the dear child gave me, and he used to pass by the garden wall and wave to me. Oh, what a pity!"

"Hmmm!" said Don Jaime.





OUGHING RATHER LIKE A WIND-broken horse, the train crawled along one of the endless defiles through which its tortuous course was laid. The wooden coach, with its rows of double seats along each side, was rank with odors as penetrant as they were all-inclusive. Tobacco smoke, perspiration, cheap perfume, orange peel, stale beer, bananas and an almost limitless host of less assertively fragrant compounds seemed to have striven valiantly for olfactory supremacy; but not even the weakest of the vanquished had quitted the field.

Yet Desiderio found it all pleasant, since it was one of the markers which signalized the completeness of his break from commonplace routine. New places to see! New things to do! Even the empty, discarded beer bottles, rolling unheeded about the floor of the jolting coach, had their share in the charm.

Those two girls, now. He could readily picture his mother's frown of black disapproval. He could almost hear her sibilant "Shameless!" And yet he thought they looked uncommonly jolly in their modern clothes. Certainly they seemed to be enjoying themselves in capital fashion. Even the other women on the train grinned and chuckled when one of the pair called to a pompous ranchman among the passengers:

"Come sit with us and buy us some beer, *gordito!*"

The ranchman was a portly big fellow, torn between an inborn desire to swagger and a cautious prudence about revealing himself as a member of the caste which was so directly the target of revolutionary hostility. He had shaved off his once ostentatious mustaches, his *charro* clothing was of coarse quality, but he wore a revolver belted at his hip, and every once in so often he would leave his seat and make a single passage up and down the coach. It was on one of these trips that the two gay young harlots had pricked the bubble of his dignity by hailing him so blithely.

"Eh, there, Little Fatty, come sit with us and buy us some beer."

With a haughty pretense that he had heard nothing, the *bacendado* stalked back to his seat. All those to whom his bids for conspicuousness had been vaguely irritating, when he strutted up and down the length of the coach, chuckled with satisfaction. Even the women, respectable farmwives and the like, fussing over their children, thought more kindly of the two erring sisters.

Three students who occupied a double seat and sang bawdy songs to the accompaniment of the guitar which one of them strummed, called over to the girls:

"How about us? We'll be more than glad to get you some beer."

"Don't misjudge our price, little one. We come higher than a glass of beer."

"Two glasses of beer, then, since I like the keen edge to your hatchet."

"Is that the best you can offer?"

"Of course not. I was no more than jesting. An ocean of beer, with the moon bobbing about on top of the foam,

would not be enough for such loveliness as yours, little sweethearts," one of the students offered gallantly.

"But no stars, for it would be unfair to bring stars into competition with such sparkling eyes," added another.

The girls laughed with delight and made room for the young men, who crowded over and began to sing army versions of popular tunes. Even such tender and innocent folk lyrics as *La Paloma* have army verses which are veritable brothel ballads. Out of consideration for the other women and the children in the coach, the more vigorous passages were either omitted in their entirety, or discreetly cloaked behind an amorphous tum-te-tum which followed the air.

*Estaban las tres pelonas  
Sentadas en la banqueta,  
La Cuca, la Juana, y la pelona Trinidad,  
Haciéndose la ta-tum-ta . . .*

"And what are you laughing at, Rufino Escandia?" demanded an indignant matron of her husband, who knew very well what the full text described the three bob-haired girls as doing. "Have you no shame in front of all the world? Not to say a word about your innocent children, who assuredly are deserving of a better fate than to be branded in the eyes of every one as the offspring of . . ."

"Peace! In the name of the Holiest Virgin of Guadalupe, peace! Even the *huertistas* permit us to smile now and again. Just because you saw me looking at that necklace day before yesterday . . ."

"Well and well did I know it was not for me you were going to buy it. I have not been wife to you these many years without knowing you are too tight-grasping to do anything like that for me. But let one of these town hussies so much as peep out of the corners of her eyes at

you, and nothing in all the wide world is too good for her."

The husband sighed and turned from her to the aisle, where he met the sympathetic and understanding gaze of a man in the seat across the way. With the easy unrestraint of fellow-passengers they began to talk, exchanging cigarette husks and tobacco.

"Bah! Crops!" the luckless husband's new-found acquaintance said in reply to a question. "What is the use of planting anything any more? The minute it comes up out of the ground it is seized by one army or another. They do not leave you corn enough for yourself and your children to eat. What I did, I went far back into the mountains this spring, and planted a little grain very secretly, hoping I will find something there to harvest in the fall. The deer and the birds will leave me more than these soldiers do. 'Ho, corn for our horses!' here, and 'Hai, beans for our cooking-pots!' there. Whether it is grain or eggs or a pig or a young daughter . . . the only thing to do with them in these days is to hide them."

"And the long time it has been going on, too! Now they say it is going to go on still longer. They have hardly driven out Huerta than Carranza and Villa are pulling at one another's hair. What revolution nor what nothing! They said the revolution would give us back our lands. A pure one! What good are lands when everything you grow on them is seized before it is barely up out of the earth?"

"The sheer truth, friend, no more than the sheer truth. Besides, I don't believe they have driven out Huerta. They say anything, these days. And who is Carranza? Another Huerta, true? They are all alike, all but Villa. He is the man. He takes money away from the rich. He will free us all from taxes. The money from the rich will suffice. What is left over he gives to us, to the poor ones."

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"If I did not have a family, I would have joined with Villa long since myself. His soldiers want for nothing, they say. Mountains of meat whenever they wish to . . ."

A shrill whistle-blast from the engine was followed by a deafening detonation. There was a rending crash, and those in the coach were hurled forward. Women and children began to scream. A crackle of musketry fire added its din to the uproar, and bullets began to splinter through the wood paneling of the coach. Beyond some painful bruises, Desiderio was unhurt. He clawed his way down the packed center aisle toward the door and the platform.

"My leg! My leg is broken into pieces! In the name of God, do not step on me!" a man's voice roared in anguish.

"Holiest Mary!" shrieked a woman. "He is dead! My baby—I cannot wake him!"

From the throng that jammed the door, Desiderio was shot into the open much as the pulp of a squeezed grape is expelled from its skin. The engine was drunkenly tilted, its nose down at the bottom of a small arroyo whose trestle had been dynamited just ahead of them, its cab slanting back and upward into the splintered wreckage of a freight-car which had telescoped itself over the tender. Even as the boy looked, the wooden fragments began to smoke and smolder.

Heedless of the panic about him, Desiderio scrambled to the wall of the defile and squatted down against the slope to await developments. He noted that the attacking fire was directed at the rear car of the train, an open gondola over which a shed-roof of matched boards had been raised on uprights, and in which a contingent of soldiers had been riding. These now came boiling out of the free space between the edge of the car and the hang of the roof, and ran toward the walls of the cut on each side.

Working as unostentatiously as he could, Desiderio tilted a flat slab of limestone a trifle on one edge, propping it into this position with a small rock. As though seeking to shield himself from the fire of the attackers, he dropped flat to the earth, face down, and under cover of his own huddled body, furtively slid a packet of letters beneath the slab. Then he picked away the stone prop, so that the flat rock sank back nearly to its original position. He lay still until the firing ceased.

A voice called down from the crest of the cut.

"Yield or we kill you all."

"We will yield nothing!" a slim young officer, a captain, shouted back, adding a select string of obscenities. A fresh crackle of firing answered him. Securely sheltered behind large rocks, or beyond the crest of the cut, the attackers could almost afford to be choice in their selection of targets. A horrible wail, rising to a harrowing crescendo, cut through the din.

The fire from the forward box-cars, which had been telescoped upon the tilted engine, had spread back to the passenger-coaches. A civilian with a broken leg had crawled as far as the platform, hitching himself along an inch or two at a time. Once in the open, however, he collapsed. Not even at a crawl could he negotiate the tilted steps to the ground. Flames from the wooden structure on which he lay licked all about him, and his moans had become wails, and now his wails were rasping screams of agony as the blaze hid his crumpled form from view. Some men started forward, but bullets from the slope drove them back.

"Surrender, or we keep on killing!" was shouted from above during the next lull in the firing. His head held low,

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as though in shame, the young captain slouched to the open, waving a white shirt. The firing stopped.

"Lay down your arms and go stand in the tracks beyond the train," the authoritative voice from somewhere up the slope directed.

This was done. The walls of the cut sprang into life. Silhouettes appeared along the summit, figures emerged from hiding-places among the broken rocks on both slopes, and all began a scrambling descent. The leader of the attackers, a giant of a man, paraded up and down in front of the disarmed soldiers who were lined along the track.

"You are all prisoners of my General Arrieta," he informed them. "Who is the *jefe* of this detachment?"

"I am in command and at your orders," replied the young captain.

"Then good. My orders are first for all of you to go comb the hair of the whore, your mother. But before you do so, turn over to me all arms, ammunition, money and anything else you have." He turned to his own men. "Go search the train before the whole condemned thing burns up." Once more he addressed the captain of the vanquished detachment. "What are you convoying, anyway? A payroll?"

"No, we are no more than being sent to Mapimí."

"Yes, I know. To help that fat hog, Villa. My General Arrieta will soon show him what it means to murder delegates to a convention. I suppose Villa thought when he had Colonel Manzanera killed at Aguascalientes that Domingo Arrieta would forget about it. Well, he'll see, the foul traitor, who broke his oath to Carranza." He spat in disgust. "Clean out the baggage-cars first!" he suddenly shouted to his men. "Get through with them before they burn up! We can search the passengers afterwards. If you

find any one who looks as though there might be something to him, bring him to me."

He glanced casually in the direction of the civilians, who were still huddled against the walls of the cut, and for the first time he saw the two young harlots. He smiled broadly.

"But look here, what a surprise! Enchantresses, no more and no less," he observed. "Surely, you would not mind coming with us, eh? We will treat you well . . . Such pretty little innocents, shy little doves who have not yet seen anything of the world. You stand in need of protection, eh? Then good; while we are not in a position to offer you many citified luxuries, there is still a good deal of loot to be picked up, as you can see right here before your pretty eyes. Wouldn't you like a share in it, eh? What do you say?"

"Such a handsome colonel!" giggled one of the girls. "Are all your men as fine-looking?"

"Come and see."

"How not? But would we have to walk?"

"Indeed, no. We will provide a couple of fine horses and—who knows?—if you prove to be amiable girls, the General himself may take a fancy to you. How would you like that, eh? Of course, it will be ten or fifteen days before we go in to report to him, and in the meantime . . ."

"Who would sigh for generals when you were near, Señor Coronel?"

The fat *hacendado* who had so incurred the dislike of his fellow passengers on the train, sidled over to Desiderio during this sprightly interchange, and now nudged him.

"Here, take this gun, lad," he said anxiously. "You may need it. They will not harm an old man like me, but if you should have to defend yourself, here is something you can rely on."

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"I do not want any gun," Desiderio promptly informed him. "You are only afraid to have them find it on you."

The big colonel looked sharply about.

"What goes on?" he snapped briskly.

"Oh, there's our Little Fatty!" tittered one of the harlots. "The one who wouldn't buy us any beer. He's trying to give away his gun, and look, the child he is trying to give it to! Get it for me, my Colonel. If I am to join the army I must have weapons. Let us see if you mean what you say."

"Here, give me that revolver!" barked the officer, striding across the intervening space and wrenching the pistol roughly out of the fat *bacendado*'s hand. "This is no sort of toy for a grandfather like you to be playing with. But first we must see if it is a good one."

He took careful aim.

"Don't point that at me, for the love of God!" wailed the rancher.

"Stand still, man," snapped the officer. "How can I be certain of my aim if you tango about like that? At your age, too! Be ashamed of yourself."

He pulled the trigger and sent a bullet through the instep of the rancher's left foot.

"Yes, it will do quite well; it is not a bad gun at all," he announced in a pleased voice. The *bacendado* stared at his foot incredulously and then collapsed with a howl. "Now the belt, grandfather."

Groaning and weeping, the rancher unbuckled the cartridge belt and passed it over. The officer handed gun and belt to the girl who had asked for it, and she promptly fastened it about her slim hips, where it showed in odd contrast to her modern garb.

The reek of burning flesh had become almost intolerable.

"Hurry up, boys!" shouted the big colonel. "Let us get

away from this stench. It is not the right perfume for these little *compañeras*. Two of you climb the telegraph poles and cut the wires. Bring this bit of a captain with you. My General Arrieta will want to ask him some questions, eh? Leave the others here."

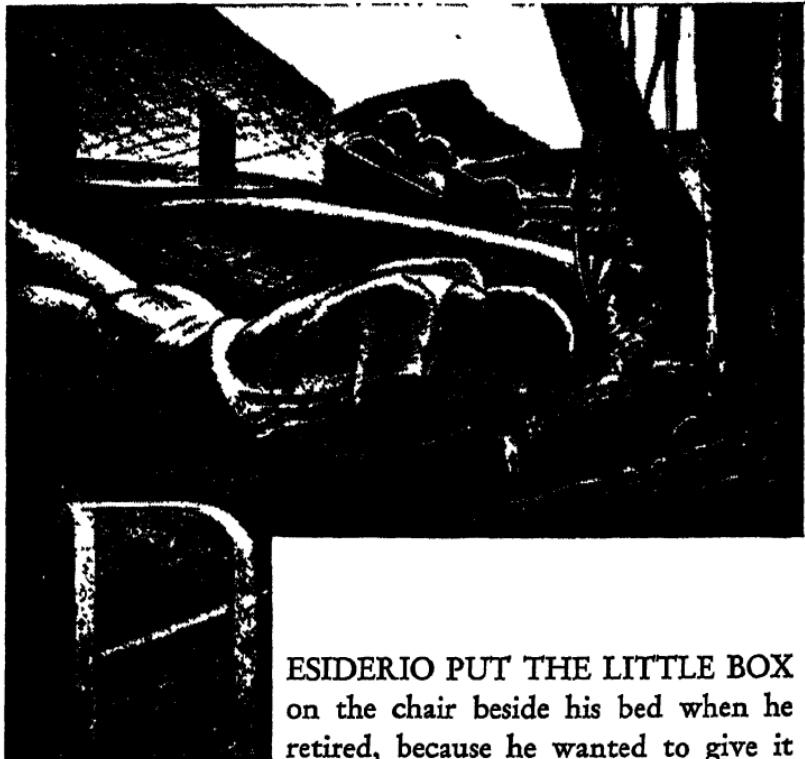
The attackers scrambled up the steep walls of the cut and disappeared over the crest.

Within two hours relief trains reached the dynamited trestle from both sides. When the wrecked train had failed to put in an appearance at its next scheduled stop, an attempt to make telegraphic inquiries revealed the fact that the wires were down. From long experience, dispatchers and other officials knew what this meant.

Desiderio did not return to Durango as did some of the other passengers. He went on toward Catalina with the relief train from the north, which coughed and puffed its way back up the line as soon as it had discharged the wrecking crew and the materials it had brought to the scene.

The boy fingered the flat packet of letters once more securely buttoned inside his shirt, and thought to himself that this was the first battle he had seen where there were no condemned federals. Both sides had been revolutionists. And yet all of the shooting and the violence seemed to have made so little difference. The trains still went on. Save for the lapse of hours and the absence of some of the passengers, there seemed to have been no bloody interlude at all. Already the coach was acquiring the same rich medley of sounds and smells that had assailed his senses before the wreck.

"... and I warn you frankly, Rufino Escandia, there is a limit even to my patience, and the very next time I catch you planning to lavish gifts on one of those painted city hussies . . ."



ESIDERIO PUT THE LITTLE BOX  
on the chair beside his bed when he  
retired, because he wanted to give it

to Xochitl the moment she got up. For himself, he did not think the pair of horn earrings especially pretty, but he knew Xochitl admired them, because he had heard her describe them enthusiastically to one of her friends, and express disappointment over her inability to buy them. Not that he was so fond of Xochitl, as far as that might go. The airs she gave herself just because she would be eighteen tomorrow were particularly irritating. In fact, it was partly on this account that he had practically beggared himself for the baubles. He wanted her to realize that he, whom she treated as a child, could give her something she was unable to provide for herself.

He had hardly dropped off to sleep, so it seemed to him, when he was awakened by the sound of music. It was not loud, but in the general stillness even the thin notes of

stringed instruments and the subdued male voices carried to all parts of the house. Desiderio giggled to himself when he realized what was afoot. Some swain was tendering his beloved a *gallo*, a sort of serenade, one of the highest compliments a wooer can bestow upon the object of his affections.

The girl's family must pretend to sleep through the entire performance, of course, for if they were known to be aware of what was transpiring, it would be the duty of her kinsmen to come charging out upon the presumptuous suitor and drive him away with dire threats of what would befall him if ever again he returned. Should they fail to do this, the young man himself would be mortally offended. He would think the family had a reason for wanting to be rid of their daughter. However, as long as the entire business is conducted with a decorous and becoming show of stealth, so that the kinfolks can pretend they have not the faintest idea of why little Ireneia stands beside the open window, everything is all right.

"That was a lovely *gallo* young Pablo Casitas gave your Dolores last night," one matron will beam to another when they meet in the market-place over their morning shopping.

"What are you saying?" the latter will reply with a great bustle of indignation, though she really feels highly complimented. "I did not even know there was a *gallo*, and I am sure that if there was it must have been meant for some one else. Dolores is not yet old enough even to think of such things."

Nor will the mother of Dolores make any remark about the fact that her daughter wears at her bodice a white rose pinned upside down when she goes to church the next Sunday morning, though the flower code is as old as the peaks of the Sierra Madre, and Dolores' mother herself used

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it when Don Salamón came a-wooing not so very many years ago.

Desiderio was beginning to take a lively though still strictly academic interest in such matters, and therefore was by no means displeased to be awakened by the soft strains of *Cielito Lindo*. Even though one might be only pretending one was giving a *gallo*, some sort of foundation for such imaginings was needed.

He assumed quite naturally that the compliment was being tendered to one of the daughters of the widower, Don Octavio Ríos, who lived across the street. Hastily he slipped from his bed in his underclothing, drew off the blanket, wrapped it about him, and thus very softly made his way toward the front of the house. The door of the living-room stood open. Since there was little danger of waking any of the family here, he all but stumbled carelessly into the room. Quite by chance he glanced up just in time to catch sight of a silhouette that blocked part of the palely luminous slit where the window shutters facing the street had been pushed apart a trifle.

Fortunately the shock of discovery stunned him and struck him motionless. By the time he could collect himself, he had likewise regained sufficient presence of mind to back away, very carefully, and without the least sound. If he had blundered into the room, and Xochitl had seen him, he would of necessity have been compelled to raise an uproar. Since what he really wanted was to learn at first hand how a *gallo* was conducted, that would have spoiled everything.

So he crossed the patio to the back garden wall, from the top of which he could easily draw himself to the flat roof of the house. Thence he made his way to the cornice overlooking the street and, flattening himself against the tiles,

he cautiously protruded his head until he could make out what was going on.

Three musicians, with guitar, violin and harp, stood well out in the street. As he watched, they threw away their cigarettes, heartened themselves with draughts of wine, and struck into *Ojos Tapatíos*:

*No hay ojos más lindos en la tierra mia  
que los negros ojos de la tapatia.*

*Miradas que matan, dolientes pupilas,  
sombra cuando duermen, luz cuando nos miran.*

The music thrilled him strangely and made him forget that, stretched out as he was upon the cold and unyielding tiles, he was prey to acute physical discomfort. It was something to look forward to, the time when he could be lordly in the matter of engaging musicians, and stand in front of bars that bowed out beyond a window, gripping the iron where two small hands were visible in the darkness. And he would wear just such fine raiment, too, a swanky *charro* suit of gray buckskin, with a great gray hat of felt to match, the wide brim edged in glittering silver braid.

He strained to hear what was being said beneath him, but that was impossible. The conversation was carried on in whispers, for of course the musicians must not overhear these momentous confidences. But once, during a pause in the music, he caught a few snatches of the talk.

"... wearing a yellow flower to the *serenata* as though I had given you the pumpkin and you were free to . . ."

"But we had quarreled. You said you never wanted to see me again."

"Ah, my little life, if you knew how I suffered, the agony I felt when I thought that . . ."

The pattering strains of *Júrame* blotted out the rest of

the sentence. Desiderio, aching in every joint, drew back from the cornice, and sought an easier position, so that he might look up at his old friends, the stars. Music like that did something wonderful to one. Yet it must be terrible to make love to a girl, to call her things like *mi vidita*, when you were right there where she could see you. And when you ran out of things to say, what then? But it must be magnificent too, because . . . but suppose she would not come to the window, and all the neighbors peeped out and saw that no one was there, that you were being scorned, what a disgrace!

He thought: How does one go about it, anyway, this love-making? How would I let a girl know I was in love with her? I could not just walk up to her and say a thing like that in so many words. Suppose I fell in love with her, and wanted to put my arms about her, and she never found it out? Yet people are always making love.

The next moment he felt himself tingling ecstatically as he pictured himself at a barred window, his hands close to hers, her dark eyes upon his . . . Would it be Elena? Gertrudis? . . . any one, indeed, but Marta Tovar, for whom his dislike had grown ever stronger . . . Elena, to be sure, with the long black lashes which lay like a caress against the soft curve of her cheek when she lowered her eyes. He had watched her at prayer no longer ago than last Sunday . . . to put one's arm about Elena . . .

He surrendered himself to the tingle that pervaded him, to the music, the stars, the cherishing night breeze, and the pretense that he could hear the gentle whisper of love-making. Assuredly this was something very different from the bawdy talk about the army campfires. When the soldiers spoke of love affairs they never mentioned such scenes as this; only drinking and brothels and brutality. There

was nothing of tenderness in the coarse jests and the neighing laughter that invariably followed. This . . . this sort of thing . . . was delightful, and . . .

A knock jarred harshly through the murmuring sounds of the night. Startled, Desiderio turned again to peep over the cornice. Then he almost giggled aloud. A herdsman with half a dozen cows was hammering at the side door, and the contrast between him and the idyll in progress only a few feet away tickled the boy mightily. He realized that it was only old Pancho, come for the cow. Even in the city, many a family kept at least one cow to supply milk for home use, and herdsmen went from house to house just before dawn to gather up the cattle of their respective clients and drive them beyond the city limits for pasturage. At nightfall they would be returned.

The side door at which Pancho had sounded his *rataplan* creaked open noisily.

"Took you long enough," grumbled the herdsman to the maid in a cracked voice. "I should think that when there is such a pretty *gallo* going on here, you would have been up to listen."

"And why should I be staying up to listen, stupid?" demanded the maid indignantly. "You think I do not work from dawn to late night as it is? You want me to sit about still longer, listening to a *gallo*?"

"That is the only way you will ever hear one, *prietita*," retorted Pancho, chuckling. "You'd better listen to the love music of others, for no one will ever stand beneath your window."

"They'd best not try it."

"Why? Suppose I were to come some night, you mean to say you would not open your door to me?"

"Only to douse a pail of water over your ugly head, Shameless!"

"Don't get red, my pretty. Bring me your niece, the cow. She is probably better company than you would be in any event, I think."

"You with your voice of a sick crow, talking *gallos!*"

"Never mind, my adored one, I will come and surprise you one of these nights, and let you discover what it is you are missing."

Pancho shuffled off in the wake of the cows toward his next house of call, bidding the lovers, who did not seem to mind his presence in the least, a courteous good-morning. The musicians began to pack their instruments. Anxious not to be caught eavesdropping, Desiderio wriggled over the tiles back to the garden wall, and scurried off to his bed-chamber. Daylight would soon be at hand, and he wanted to remain awake so as to be the first to give Xochitl her birthday present; but in spite of himself he dropped off to sleep and had to be wakened by his mother as usual.

"What a lazy good-for-nothing!" Doña Josefa scolded. "Why are you not more like your sister? She was up this morning even before I was. When I arose she was already watering the plants in the garden."

Desiderio tossed himself hurriedly into his clothes and, picking up the little box with the horn earrings, ran to the patio and thrust it into his sister's hand with a gruff "*Feliz cumpleaños!*"

Xochitl seized him when he would have scuttled off, and kissed him, to his great disgust. She seemed to be very happy, and later at breakfast hustled about the table as though she could not do enough for her family. She even insisted that Desiderio give her his cup so that she could

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substitute fresh hot coffee for its contents which, she was afraid, must have become lukewarm while he was busy with his *tortillas* and scrambled eggs.

All the family made it a point to say how soundly they had slept through the night.



USHING DOGGEDLY FORWARD, they crossed range after range of saw-spined ridges. There was nothing light or leisurely about that forced march. Come what might, they must be at a designated point near Nombre de Dios before sundown in order to start south after the men of Arrieta at dawn. The *arrietistas* had blown up more trains, they had made forays on settlements near Durango, they had seized a payroll, and the detachment which had carried out the last raid was somewhere to the southeast in the sierra.

One regiment had been sent to Ventanas in the south. Mónico González and his men were riding for Nombre de Dios to the east. They would leave these points the next day, pressing toward one another, to catch the *arrietistas* between them.

There was no conversation on the march, beyond the expletives which followed the stumbling of a horse, or the weary curses that greeted an unusually steep piece of country, where the men had to dismount, be the slope up or down, and lead their chargers till a more nearly level stretch of terrain was reached. At every waterhole they stopped to refill their canteens and water their horses. During the few minutes of rest that followed, they smoked

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and extracted thorns from the sweaty coats of the beasts.

Toward mid-afternoon of the second day, Mónico González halted them as they topped the western rim of a wide basin, while he consulted a map.

"Well and good, boys," he announced. "There it is. We camp on that slope till tomorrow." He indicated the long, wrinkled ridge that reared its crest like a cock's comb above the level of the basin. "And not on the shady side, either, but on the western slope. Hit it hard, boys. We'll be there in half an hour or so, and then we can all rest."

When they reached a camp site on the bare western flank of the mountain, Mónico González immediately dispatched sentries to the several notches along the ridge. Toribio, El Chato, and El Perico were the first group to go. Desiderio looked after them wistfully. He would have enjoyed hearing them talk as they squabbled over a card game. Disconsolately he flung himself down in the shade of one of the few mezquite shrubs in all that sun-baked upland, and waited for the hours to pass.

A sergeant hailed him.

"Take this canteen up to El Perico," he said. "Those three *tarugos* have gone off without any water, and if one of them comes back to get some, El Prieto will see him and raise the devil because he is not on his post."

Desiderio seized the canteen and set off cheerfully up the slope to the notch to which his three friends had been assigned. He whistled softly when he came within sight of the sentry post, for he had no desire to be mistaken for an enemy scout. Toribio, he knew, would be hysterically sorry if he shot his *mocosito* by mistake, but that would hardly remedy matters. As for El Perico, Desiderio had never quite forgotten the sight of him at the sack of Durango,

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firing back under his upraised arm at his own companions to make room for battering down a door.

Leaving El Perico on watch at the crest of the notch, the other two were squatted before a blanket, a short distance down the slope, playing cards. At Desiderio's whistle they looked up, and beckoned him to come on. Toribio grinned shamefacedly when he saw the canteen.

"It was my fault," he acknowledged. "Perico told me to bring the water, but what do you demand? When it comes to fighting, then good. I am your man, isn't it true? But this business of planning and thinking, leave that to the others, that is what I say. I do not want to be charged with missions."

They invited Desiderio to sit down, and he accepted gladly, and watched as they continued their play. They were gambling for cartridges, and Toribio must have been losing heavily, for he had only two of them left.

"You have the luck of a demon, Chato," he grumbled after the next hand went against him and he lost his two remaining shells. "Of course, just like they say, unlucky at cards, lucky at love, and there's no one to deny that I am a devil with the women, isn't it true?"

"Not if they leave it to you, at any rate," snapped El Perico, who had come down the slope for a drink of water. "Go on, don't sit there gawking all day. Deal the cards."

But Toribio remained motionless, almost rigid, listening to something the duller ears of the others had not yet caught. He cast himself face down on the ground and, motioning the others to silence, wriggled swiftly up the few remaining yards of the slope, peeping cautiously over the ridge. An instant later he came sliding back down.

"Who has good ears?" he demanded triumphantly. "I thought I heard rocks falling, and they are still too far

away for a good shot. But when they went over the loose stones on that slope across the . . . ”

“When who went?”

“What do I know? There are five of them. One of them may be an officer, and he’ll be wearing boots, perhaps. If that is the case, here and now I get what I have been pining for.”

The others, even Desiderio, joined him as all of them worked their way cautiously to the rim. Five horsemen were riding slowly up the winding ascent between two steep folds of the hill. El Chato raised his rifle and began to take aim. Toribio struck the weapon angrily aside.

“Stop that!” he whispered, his eyes blazing. “It is too far away to make sure you would not miss, and then they would all be gone. Besides, I talked first and I get first shot.”

“But I already took my aim. What difference does it make who talks first? You can’t kill a man by talking first.”

“No, but if that officer is wearing boots, I will be damned if I let you have them. I heard him first, I saw him first, I spoke for him first, and I’m going to get first shot.”

“Why don’t you play cards for the officer?” suggested El Perico. “I’ll deal. The first ace gets the first shot.”

“That suits me,” agreed El Chato. “I’m lucky at cards, anyway. You said so yourself, Toribio.”

“Oh, that’s always the way. Here I get a chance to acquire boots, for the very first time; and you mix it all up with rules and cards and everything. I heard him first, I saw him first, I spoke for him first—isn’t it true?”

The debate was carried on in a heated undertone.

“You can have my share of shooting down a man who does not know he’s being shot at,” El Perico jeered. “How-

ever, that's your taste, and if it affords you the least amusement to kill a man who dies before he knows what hits him, instead of capturing him and enjoying some real sport, that's likewise your affair. So no more of this bickering. It is to be settled with cards, and that ends the story. Ready?"

They had slipped back down the slope to where the blanket was spread, with the blotter-edged and greasy cards still tumbled upon it.

"Nobody ever listens to me—you'd think I didn't have any rights whatever," grumbled Toribio sullenly. "Always talking about the down-trodden ones, the oppressed ones, but what about me? I saw that officer first, I spoke first, and now I have to . . ."

El Perico dealt the cards, one at a time and face up, first to one and then to the other. Of a sudden El Chato swore and Toribio uttered a subdued but thoroughly delighted "Hai!"

"I knew the Holiest Virgin had meant me to have a pair of boots!" he exclaimed. "Besides, it is no more than pure justice. I heard him first, I saw him first, and I spoke for him first, isn't it true?"

He took his rifle and made his way back to the crest, settled into a comfortable position and took careful aim. The approaching riders, who were evidently making a reconnaissance, had drawn much nearer; but it was still by no means an easy shot.

Half turning his head toward the others, Toribio called softly:

"Give me a couple of cartridges, Chato. And listen, I was right. He is wearing boots."

"What cartridges nor what nothing! Use your own. You insisted on first shot, so go ahead and shoot."

"But you slime-covered *cabrón*, you won all my car-

tridges from me, and you know it. How can I shoot unless you let me have a couple?"

"That's something for you to crack your skull over. What difference does it make to me?"

"Purest Virgin in Heaven, the officer will be gone from here and he will take my boots with him. Perico, give me a couple of your cartridges, then!"

"You go very much to hell! But I tell you what I will do, I'll sell you one. I'll give you a cartridge for your mouth-organ."

"Crazy! One cartridge for the mouth-organ I stole in Zacatecas, the best mouth-organ in the army? No, sir! Make it two cartridges, at least."

"All right, two cartridges, then. Come on!"

"Done! Where are the cartridges? Hurry up!"

"Do not tell me so! Where is the mouth-organ?"

"In my saddlebags, at the camp. Where did you suppose I kept it?"

"Well, you deliver it to me, and then I'll give you the cartridges, not before."

But El Perico saw that Toribio was being goaded beyond the limit of all endurance, and would leap upon him in another instant.

"Well and good, then. I suppose I can do nothing else but trust you."

Toribio took the cartridges sulkily.

"I've a good mind to use the second one on you," he muttered, slipping one into the chamber of his rifle. He sent the breech block home with a sharp snick, and settled himself once more to take aim. El Chato had wriggled into place beside him.

"Be sure you hit only the officer," he warned in an excited undertone. "I claim the horse for myself."

"For the love of God, what do you want with the horse?"

"I don't want the horse. But I do want that red saddle-blanket. It's a pure one, I tell you. Think how fine it will look on my mare. So don't shoot through the blanket, whatever you do."

"Ay *chingao!* You and your blankets! Look at those boots, if you want to see something. What a glistening, isn't it true?"

With shocking abruptness the rifle spoke.

"Got him!" exulted Toribio. "Now he knows who was his father."

"The horse! Shoot the horse now before he runs out of range!" clamored El Chato.

"You shoot the horse, my old one, go on, use one of those cartridges you stole from me. I would be a pure one to use my last cartridge, that I paid a mouth-organ for, to get you a red blanket, isn't it true?"

"But my rifle is back down there. By the time I get it the horse will be out of range," bawled El Chato.

"Do I get back my cartridges?"

"Yes, yes. Anything."

"And five more?"

"Yes."

Again Toribio cuddled the stock of his weapon and squeezed the trigger.

"Through the very head," he boasted. "Look at those other four bastards gallop!"

There was a pounding of hoofs behind them as the soldiers from the camp came thundering up the slope in response to the alarm of the first shot, Mónico González in the lead.

"What happened?"

"Nothing but some little officer that was wearing boots,"

explained Toribio tolerantly. "No need to excite yourself, Prieto. I got him. He is dead."

"Dead? What good are dead men to me? Why didn't you take him prisoner, you lunkheads? We could have found out where the main body is, we could have . . . and now the others have gone to give the alarm and tell them where we are. You ought to be . . ."

"I said we should take them prisoner," El Perico interrupted. "I kept telling them what was the sport in shooting a man who didn't know he was being shot at. But look, Prieto, you can still see the four men, and there's no need to let them get away. Only look! They will have to pass through that cut to the left, and by going back down the draw over here you can head them off."

"We can do it, by God!" Mónico González agreed. "Here! Ten of you ride in pursuit of them from here, to keep them moving, and also to cut them off if they decide to double back this way. The rest of you follow me."

They went drumming down the slope on both sides of the crest. Toribio began to grumble.

"That's the way it always is—no matter what I do, it is always wrong. I have my belly full. When you are making war, the thing to do is to kill the enemies, isn't it true? However, it's not important this time. I have my boots. That is enough."

He, Desiderio and El Chato went afoot to the place where the fallen officer lay. It was no easy task to tug the boots from the limp and unresisting legs, but by dint of much struggling Toribio finally achieved it and proudly held up his prizes.

"Villa himself has not got a finer pair," he boasted as he tied them loosely together by the straps and hung them

from his neck, one dangling over each shoulder. El Chato had bundled up the red saddle-blanket and was lugging it manfully up the hillside. "Come, Desiderio. Let's get back to camp."

The boy hesitated.

"Could . . . could I have the bridle?" he asked Toribio doubtfully. "It is much better than mine."

"Assuredly. Just help yourself. Nothing is too good for a friend of mine, isn't it true? Only hurry. I will walk on ahead."

Desiderio hastily slipped the bridle over the dead horse's head and worked the bit out of its mouth. Then he followed Toribio, who was already far up the slope, and who disappeared beyond the rim a moment later. As the boy hastened to catch up with him, he was momentarily checked by an agonized howl.

"Sons of all the watery whores of Babylon!" wailed the voice of the invisible Toribio. "No more than see what has happened to me!"

Badly frightened, Desiderio broke into a run, and plunged over the ridge to the farther slope in the direction of an anguished voice that poured out an unbroken torrent of maledictions. He found Toribio squatting on the ground, the new boots still securely draped like ornaments on either side of his neck, holding up a foot whose great toe was bleeding profusely.

"Why, it tore the nail clear out by the roots," he bellowed, rocking back and forth. "What agony! What pain! I was no more than trotting along, hurrying back to camp, when I stumbled over something and stuck my foot into a sharp rock that has torn the nail right out of the great toe."

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Suddenly he checked his lamentation, looked up, and grinned his old wide, toothless smile.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" he beamed. "Assuredly it might have been worse. Only think! I might have been wearing my boots, and then I would have scratched one of them badly, isn't it true?"



ONGINOS ARROYO Y LEIVA! A name to conjure with! Especially now, when the famous Arroyo, whose genius was acknowledged everywhere, and who had achieved high renown even in the great cities of the United States, had returned to Durango to open a studio while he painted a mural for one of the public buildings.

"A sound artist," Don Jaime held forth to Desiderio, "and a Mexican through and through. No second-hand copyist of Barbizon technique, painting a *mezquital* landscape as Millet would have painted a Normandy farm scene. A Mexican, I tell you. One who gives the world, in what he portrays, the interpretation a Mexican puts upon what he sees about him. Such men as Arroyo will do more than a thousand like Porfirio Díaz to win recognition for our nation as a cultural factor in the civilized world of today."

Everything about the great painter spoke of magnificence. He had ordered from Don Jaime a dozen two-foot mannikins in various poses, to be used as models in the painting of draperies. The canvas for his mural measured fifty feet by twenty and had been specially woven in the United States. His riding-habit of shepherd plaid had been tailored

in London. The prices he received for portraits were nothing short of fabulous. The diamond pendant worn on state occasions by his señora wife had once been the property of a Russian archduchess. Why, it would be a coveted privilege even to sweep out the studio of such a master.

Arroyo reintroduced himself formally to Durango by a lecture and exhibition to which he invited all the art-lovers and notables in the city. General Saturnino Arizpe and a number of his officers, in their brilliant uniforms set off by dress swords, were among the guests. So was the dumpy little spinster who taught the daughters of well-to-do families china painting and pyrography; so were Higenio Baranda, the sign-painter, and Federico de las Casas, the starveling artist who copied Corot, Troyon and Daubigny landscapes on the doors of iron safes, and who had only a vast contempt for the blurry technique of Monet and other moderns.

Architects, lawyers, physicians and writers had been invited to the reception. Among the latter was Angel Gómez, to whose trenchant pen the *Alacrán* owed many of its most widely quoted articles. All these were gathered at the studio of Don Longinos when the great man delivered a lecture on the development of native Mexican art, comparing the Maya and Aztec stelæ to the carvings of ancient Egypt and Babylon, illustrating what he said with sketches swiftly limned on the leaves of a wall-pad.

The rustle of stiff black silk was almost as loud as the slight scraping of chairs when the applause had died away and the auditors rose to stroll about the studio upon whose walls portraits and landscapes and allegories were displayed, and to partake of refreshments. There was a bowl of vigorous punch for the men and another of cool lemonade for

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the ladies. Don Longinos drew aside Desiderio's father and the boy.

"If you will do me the great favor, Don Jaime," he said in an undertone, "to wait with your son until the others have gone? I have already requested my General Arizpe and young Angel Gómez to remain likewise. There is a matter to discuss."

Gradually the guests departed, and finally the Señora de Arroyo graciously withdrew, leaving the studio to the four men and the boy after these had informed her in chorus that they wished her very good nights and were at the feet of the señora. A servant set before them a tray of liqueurs, cigars and cigarettes.

"You will wonder why I have asked you to remain," Don Longinos told Desiderio's father. "I have taken the liberty already to discuss the matter with the General, and I may say at the outset that he has been good enough to see the matter with my eyes. The case is, I have taken a fancy to your son. I am told he has much talent, and since I must have an assistant, in any event, I have thought that this should be Desiderio."

Don Jaime beamed.

"This is truly a surprise," he said. "And what a flattering one! Lello, that is the greatest compliment you have ever received."

The boy, too embarrassed to speak, gulped and nodded.

"I took up the matter with my General Arizpe because I understood the lad was in the army, and naturally he is at the orders of his officers."

"But I have salved my conscience," boomed General Arizpe. "I have told myself that we need good cartographers who can go about the country in preparation for a battle, drawing maps in perspective which even un-

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trained soldiers can understand. Now that the revolution is really a thing of the past, though unfortunately the fighting may go on for years longer, I feel sincerely that we have no right to stifle any such talent."

"I am glad to hear you say the revolution is a thing of the past," Angel Gómez interrupted enthusiastically. "It bears out the contention I am always making. Our hardest problem at the moment is to convince the people that in spite of what they suffer—forgive me if I speak plainly, my General—at the hands of the soldiery, the revolution itself is still the fine and noble force for regeneration it always was. We counsel them to turn a deaf ear to the reactionaries who would return us to the old order of things because we have not yet succeeded in consolidating the liberties and the reforms to which constitutionalism pledged itself."

Don Jaime sipped appreciatively from a tiny glass of green Chartreuse.

"Your chief difficulty," he pointed out, "arises from the fact that you must carry conviction to empty bellies. The people of Durango have not had enough to eat in months. Huerta is ousted, yes. That should have meant a victory. But Villa and Carranza broke, and this time, to all seeming, it was not over a principle, but merely a question of which political set of individuals was to snatch the fruits of victory. That is why the people are asking themselves whether, after all, they were not better off, or at least as well off, in the days of Díaz."

"Yes, Mexico is suffering," agreed Gómez, "but before God selects a man for great destinies, He puts him to the proof. So it is today with Mexico. This is our nation's Gethsemane. If we weather these hardships we prove our-

selves worthy to receive the true blessings that are to follow."

"I am all at sea in politics," Don Longinos said with a wry smile. "All I can find in this present situation is something ugly, whereas in the revolution as such there was much beauty."

"But you ask too much all at once," protested Gómez. "The revolution as a fact and the revolution as a set of principles are two different things. The one is physical, and comes to an end with its physical termination. The other is metaphysical, and therefore timeless, disembodied, and not subject to decay."

"What a lot of stir about words!" scoffed General Arizpe. "And to what, if one be permitted to ask, do they lead?"

"To precisely this, my General," replied Angel Gómez, jumping up, his eyes flashing. "The revolution is like a plant that has just sprung from its seed. It was enclosed in a harsh and confining shell, which it burst by its own force, and that was the overthrow of the Díaz régime through Madero. The effort to burst the shell exhausted the forces stored in the seed. The rest of its labors it must accomplish by growth, drawing substance from without. The Madero movement which initiated the process could do no more than provide the beginning, the germination. Then good! Above the germ that had just rent the shell of its confinement was now pressed the hard earth which once more sought to hold it down and keep it from the light. That was the Huerta régime, the next obstacle that had to be overcome. But by this time our little plant had its rootlets everywhere, it was nurtured by the very ground whose weight was oppressing and imprisoning it. It penetrated into the most remote places and it burst at last through the dirt into the sunlight of freedom. Now

it must grow. True, there are suckers springing up from the same roots, each trying to become the main plant. But that will take care of itself. One of them will survive and become the invincible and mighty tree that delights us with beauty and affords the gracious shade of abundance and prosperity for the refreshment of the whole Mexican nation."

"That may sound well when you put it that way," rejoined Don Jaime dryly, "but if you will forget all your pretty words and smooth phrases about destiny and glory you will see it with the eyes of the people. We told them Madero would set things right. Did he? No! Then we told them he would have set them right had he not been betrayed by Huerta; but now Huerta is gone, driven out of the country, and what are we, who told the people that if we once got rid of Huerta everything would come right—what are we to say to them now? Villa says his government will set things right because his puppets are the creatures named by the military conference of Aguascalientes. Carranza says his government is the only one that can set matters straight, because it is the only government organized under the constitutional régime of the Plan of Guadalupe, and therefore the only legitimate one . . . and meanwhile there is still no effective suffrage, the village lands have not yet been returned, the labor reforms have not yet been enacted, the provision forbidding reelections has not yet been put into effect, and the people are starving. Can you alter that picture by brushing pretty words over it?"

Desiderio had seldom seen his father so deeply stirred.

"I can only say this," Angel Gómez retorted. "No matter which side is wrong, the aims of the revolution itself are still splendid. It is a noble cause, and like a piece of driftwood in the sea, a noble cause can never be wholly sub-

merged. The waves of some sudden tempest may seem to be making a mock of it; the billows may toss it wildly to and fro; but sooner or later it comes to rest in some quiet harbor, safe at last upon the friendly sands of some securely sheltered beach."

"Bah! Like a piece of driftwood! And what good is a piece of driftwood after it is finally washed ashore? What purpose can it serve save to be consumed by fire? I do not like your metaphors, my friend. First God is putting us to the test to see if we are worthy, then the seed is sprouting, and yet your noble tree in whose shade all the weary sons of Anáhuac were to find refreshment is only a piece of driftwood cast up on the beach. That's a depressing sort of destiny."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" interrupted Don Longinos. "After all is said and done, this was not to be the occasion for a political debate. We came here not to discuss the course of the events that are troubling our harassed country, but the future of an artist, true?"

"Besides which," added General Arizpe, "it will all be over soon, one way or another. The forces of Obregón and Villa are both gathered about Celaya in Guanajuato. There has already been one indecisive battle. Any day, now, the issue will be renewed, and the side which holds the field at Celaya when the battle is finished is the side which will win the struggle, mark me well."

"I certainly hope you are right," Don Jaime sighed. "I wonder if our friends are in the field there with Villa. I mean Mónico González and the others. A good boy, Mónico, from my home village. He has risen to a colonelcy."

"Colonel González? No, he is not there. He is with a

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detachment that is guarding Torreón against the *carran-zistas.*"

"Perhaps it is just as well. There are a number of our people from San Antonio del Mezquital stationed thereabouts. I believe we even have a confessor there . . . a youngster by the name of Chago Rojas. He joined the army as soon as he was ordained last fall. Told us a lot of things about having a call to save the souls of Villa's soldiers and . . ."

"Santiago Rojas? You can't possibly mean Santiago Rojas?" asked General Arizpe incredulously.

"But I do mean Santiago Rojas. El Joto, they used to call him in the village, for there was no denying that he was on the playing-with-dolls order, if you catch my meaning."

"Don't tell me so! Not that demon!"

"Demon?"

"Colonel Rojas is the most recklessly brave idiot who holds a commission under Villa. The reports are full of him. He has dislodged the enemy from this point, from that point, he has captured a whole cavalry regiment with a handful of men . . . don't tell me you haven't heard of Santiago Rojas!"

"It can't possibly be the same man. I tell you Chago was so effeminate that we always suspected there must be something of the . . ."

"But it is the same man. I remember having heard that he joined the army as a confessor, and how it was discovered quite by accident what a remarkable shot he was. Courageous? They say he fears no odds or danger. Who was it visited us just the past month or so and told me the whole story? No matter, this Rojas is a nephew of General Arnulfo Rojas. Effeminate? Heh! They say he revels

in blood and slaughter. Even Villa has rebuked him for his treatment of prisoners."

"If that's the case, and I am still constrained to doubt it, my wife must never hear of it. He was always a great favorite of hers, so devout and gentle, always bringing her plants and flowers . . . Unbelievable! I still feel it is quite impossible. Men do not change so completely overnight."

"The change may not be so profound," Don Longinos argued. "After all, it is just a single step from one kind of abnormality to another. But let us not forget, as I reminded you once before, that there is another and far more important matter to be settled here tonight, Don Jaime. The General agrees that Desiderio should be given a furlough from the army to study for his chosen profession. I am anxious to engage a boy of talent as a sort of general handy lad around the studio, and I promise to pay him, and in addition to give him all the instruction in my power. So what do you say?"

"What can I say, Don Longinos? I am overwhelmed and delighted. When do you wish him to start?"

"At once. Tomorrow morning."

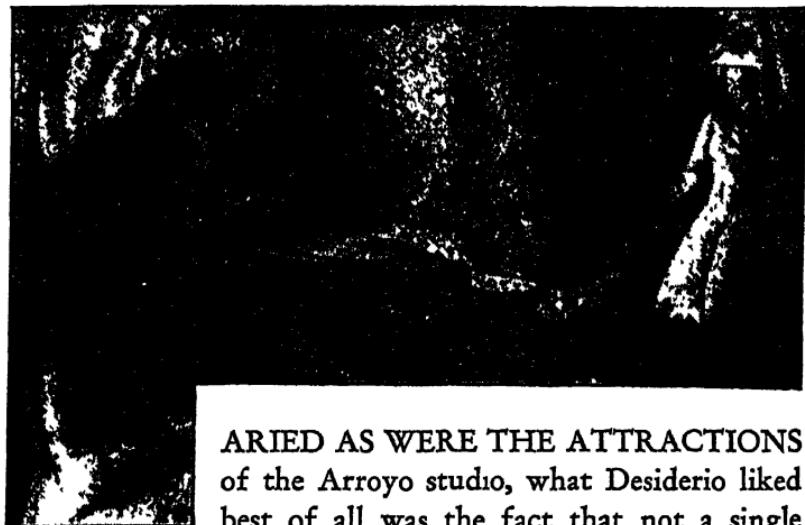
"Lello, what do you say?"

Desiderio tried to speak, but the murmur he produced was rather completely unintelligible, even to himself. He was overcome by a sense of inferiority, a feeling that he would never be able to measure up to the exacting standards of so famous a master, and it was this fear he wanted to put into words.

Don Jaime laughed.

"I can imagine how the boy feels," he said. "I assure you he is as highly flattered and delighted as I am. The best proof of it is that he cannot even say what he would like. You may be sure he will be here in the morning."





ARIED AS WERE THE ATTRACTIONS of the Arroyo studio, what Desiderio liked best of all was the fact that not a single goat's-bladder was to be found anywhere about the place. There were always some of them in a jar of water at Don Jaime's shop, for they were indispensable in giving to the final coats of color on a carved wooden statue the glistening, flawless polish which was demanded. First the two coats of white sizing were allowed to dry, after which they were rubbed with fine sandpaper and powdered stone. Then the colors were applied, and these were finally slicked down with a piece of wet bladder stretched tightly over the ball of the thumb.

Everything about Arroyo's establishment said "studio" rather than "workshop." Wonderfully enough, the paint came in tubes and could be squeezed out upon a palette in twisting coils. At Don Jaime's, the paint always came in the form of a dry powder which had to be ground and reground on an agate slab. Then it was mixed with linseed oil and left to stand in cans or large glass jars. After a day or so, a horrible leathery scum would form on top, and this had to be removed each time the paint was used.

There was something attractive even about the smell of the Arroyo studio. But the best touch of all was the

Roman chair. In one of the few flickery motion pictures Desiderio had ever seen, part of the action had been laid in the studio of a real artist in Paris. In that scene there had been a Roman chair. Think of it, now! No more than think of it! Don Longinos had just such a chair in his place, with a glittering piece of brocade thrown carelessly over one arm.

Every morning Desiderio swept out the long studio with the windows all in one wall; and every evening the last thing he did was to wash out the brushes, first with turpentine and then with soap and water, after which he stood them upright in a clay vase to dry. The great Arroyo had painted a portrait of Diana Sarracho in an evening frock of pale, sea-foam green with a fan of dyed ostrich-plumes to match. Now he was so besieged by other commissions to paint portraits that he had not even begun the government mural which was to be crowded with figures from Mexico's colorful past: Guatémoc, Hidalgo, Allende, Morelos, Bravo, Guadalupe Victoria, Iturbide, Santa Ana, Juárez, Maximilian, Díaz, Madero. There were a number of portfolios filled with sketches; but the portraits took up all Arroyo's time. Twice a week General Arizpe sat in full uniform. There were fat dowagers who asked to be painted with many jewels adorning their fingers. There was an attorney who posed with his right hand inserted between the first and second buttons of his frock coat while his left hand held a scroll.

At first Don Longinos had Desiderio make sketches of block hands, a plaster panther, the mask of an Apollo, draperies flung haphazard over various objects, and the like. He made little comment in words on the boy's work, but it was always easy to know whether or not he was displeased. Now and then, however, he would burst forth into a tirade:

"Why must you put that highlight down there? Simply because, through an accidental freak of lighting it happens to be there in the object you are drawing? Listen, little blockhead, if the only thing to this business were the faithful and meticulous reproduction of what is before you, any schoolmistress with a cheap kodak can do the job better than you, than I, than any draftsman. If a dramatist merely turned a gramophone on an ordinary dinner-table conversation and recorded it word for word, how dramatic would the result be? Do you not understand that your drawing must have its own meaning? You have in the folds of that drapery a certain swing of lines, converging on a certain point, and giving to the whole a certain symphonic accord. Isn't that correct? Now why must you interrupt that harmony with a discordant note like that highlight? Does a composer who wants to express pastoral calm in his music fill his score with barnyard sounds like the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, or the clucking of fowls? Remember, after this, that you are not a kodak-snapping tourist from a manufacturing town in the United States. Tear that outrage up and make me a real drawing."

And once when they had gone out with pads and pencils to Cerro Mercado on a Sunday morning to make some sketches, Desiderio felt disheartened by the smeary blacks and grays he had achieved, and yet did not know how to alter. Arroyo, who had stopped to sharpen a pencil, looked over his shoulder. The painter said nothing for a long minute, and Desiderio could feel his ears begin to redden.

"Then good," grunted Don Longinos at length. "That texture has it. Of course it does not look like the sky over there beyond the crest, but from the sky you get a certain feeling, and from your sketch you get the same feeling, and that is what you are trying to achieve—an emotional re-

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action. Well, never mind. The time will come soon enough when you understand this more fully. I think we will keep this sketch."

There was always something to be done around the studio: canvas to be stretched over frames, or backgrounds to be painted in where the colors were solid. Of late, too, Desiderio had been making the enlargements for his preceptor's portraits. Arroyo would pose his subjects and make a small preliminary sketch on paper. Desiderio would rule this off in squares and then transfer the drawing, square by enlarged square, to the canvas on which Don Longinos would later paint the finished picture.

Frequently, too, the more devout among the artist's wealthy clients would order from the master a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In those cases Desiderio always made the conventional sketch and laid on the first coats of brown pigment. When not engaged on a portrait, Don Longinos generally busied himself with sketches from life, tall Japanese screens shielding from view the space where he was thus engaged. Snatches of the conversation would drift from the enclosure now and then. These were, for a time, quite unfathomable, though they seemed to follow a fairly well standardized pattern.

"... and how can you know the depths of artistry until you have tasted life to the fullest? How can you give inspiration, my dear, until you yourself have been inspired?"

This phrase Desiderio heard so often that it impressed itself upon his memory. He learned to listen for it whenever there was a new model, and he was rarely disappointed. What made the words particularly significant was the fact that invariably they heralded the prompt departure either of Desiderio or of the model. The routine of this business of making sketches from life seldom deviated. Flushed with

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enthusiasm, the *maestro* would bring a new girl to the studio, bustling about and talking excitedly while he set up the screens which shut off one section of the long apartment from general observation. After that there was almost always a lull in the proceedings, followed by an expostulation from Arroyo.

"But, my dear child, do you not understand? If I merely wanted clothes I could hang them on any wooden mannikin. It is the body, the living tissue, that gives meaning to the form; that is what an artist must have."

There would be an indistinct murmur of protest.

"Oh, what nonsense, when I am old enough to be your father. But if you say no . . . However, it grieves me. You are so beautiful. With you to inspire me I could make a painting that all the world would acclaim, a Madonna Raphael himself might have envied, a *Giaconda* which would . . ."

After a time:

"You have a beautiful figure, a ravishing figure, truly, *cielito* mine. Now stand over here on the throne . . . no, little silly, I know it is only a platform, but we call it a throne. It ought to be a throne carved out of gold, for such a princess as . . . Now, let us see what we can do."

There would be an interlude, followed at length by a testy exclamation and the sound of a sheet of paper being wadded and crumpled into a ball.

"I tell you what it is, your figure is perfection, nothing short of perfection. I think it is the very loveliest figure in the world, but you have no depth, no fire; it might be the figure of a young boy or an old nun . . ."

And then would come the sentence for which Desiderio by this time had learned to wait.

". . . and how can you know the depths of artistry until

you have tasted life to the fullest? How can you give inspiration, my dear, until you yourself have been inspired?"

After that, one of two things happened. The model would come from behind the screen, fully clad, and would leave, usually carrying her nose well in the air. Or the *maestro* himself would appear.

"Lello, go down to the *lavadero* and make me half a dozen sketches of the women at their washing. Just the lines, you understand. I want some figures to fit a composition. Perhaps it would be better if you made ten sketches."

Or:

"Go to the house of Don Umberto Agüero and ask him if he will have the goodness to let you copy the initial letters from the illuminated manuscript he showed me the other day."

Or:

"Go to your father's studio and carve me a three-foot figure with outspread arms. The one we have here is too small."

On one such occasion Don Longinos asked him to deliver a note at the other end of the city and wait for an answer. Donning his cap and jacket, Desiderio left the studio and had almost reached the plaza before he realized he had forgotten to take the note with him. He did not want Arroyo to learn of his carelessness, and, knowing that the painter would be busy at his work behind the screen where he posed his models, he stole back very softly, hoping to escape without being observed.

He had just crept in cautiously at the door of the long room when the sound of sobs struck him motionless. At first he thought the model must be crying bitterly, heartbrokenly. Then something strange about the sounds, something almost mechanistic, smote his consciousness. Abruptly

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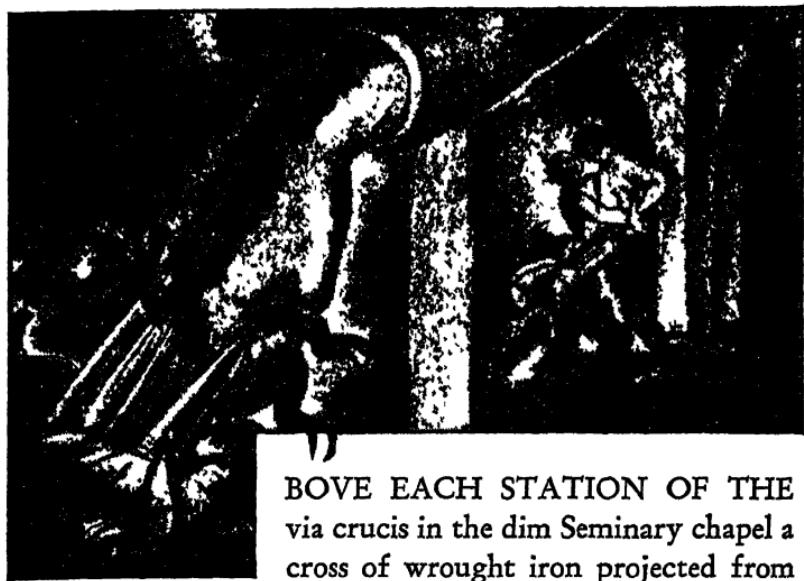
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he knew the girl was not weeping. Pulses drummed in his ears so loudly he could no longer hear the hiss of indrawn breath or the shuddering sobs with which it was released. Fortunately he had left the note he was supposed to deliver on a little console table hard by the studio door. He picked it up and tiptoed softly from the room.

Once in the open he began to giggle. But there was no mirth in the spasmodic titters which he found himself altogether unable to control. He wished his old company were back in Durango. He felt he must tell some one about this affair, but the only person in all the wide world with whom he could have discussed it was Toribio. He would like Toribio to know he was now a man of the world. Only think . . .

Perhaps, when the revolution was over . . .





BOVE EACH STATION OF THE via crucis in the dim Seminary chapel a cross of wrought iron projected from

the stone wall. To the last one, over the relief plaque of the Entombment, Santiago Rojas had tied one end of a twisted stole of black silk embroidered in silver. One of the *dorados*\* found him there while those priests who were still in possession of their faculties sought to slip away from the cloistered patio where the banquet of the harpies had been served.

Details of what transpired did not become known for days. Armed sentries had stood guard at the entrance to the cool Seminary garden and had barred the passage to any but the painted harlots who had been brought there to sit at table as the dinner partners of the shamed priests.

Santiago Rojas had led the way into the city that morning. At the head of his troops, far in the lead, a magnificent figure on a white stallion, he had stormed the breastworks

\* The *dorados* were what might be termed the super-soldiers of Pancho Villa. The word means "gilded ones," or, perhaps better, "those made golden." The officers upon whom this distinction in the armed forces of Villa was conferred wore golden medallions in token thereof. That the honor was no empty one may be inferred from the fact that while Villa's forces at the height of his power numbered about 70,000 men, there were no more than some 300 *dorados* among them.

## THE WEDGE

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of the men of Domingo Arrieta. Within five minutes of the time when he had announced in advance that he would capture the town, the church bells had begun to peal their brass-tongued proclamation of victory. For the first time in her life, Doña Josefa neglected, during a period of stress, to pray beside a fire of holy palm fronds. She, too, wanted to watch the entrance of El Joto Chago at the head of his hard-bitten regiment of fighting men, a regiment that numbered no less than six *dorados* among its officers.

She and her family had known in advance that the attack was to be made. A vagabond had knocked upon the door at nightfall the evening before, had pressed upon Desiderio a crumpled note addressed to his mother, and had vanished. The note read:

*Mi geranito:*

*Do not leave your house in the morning until after the fighting stops. We will be in possession by ten o'clock. I charge you not to divulge this to any one; only my desire to guard the safety of yourself and your cherished ones has determined me to accept the hazard of sending you this warning. Your well-being shall always be the highest consideration of him who embraces you, who kisses your hand, and who subscribes himself your most affectionate and devoted servitor,*

SANTIAGO ROJAS

She asked Don Jaime what it meant.

"It means a lot of foolishness," the sculptor replied testily. "All of Villa's armies have been broken up into small groups ever since the terrible defeats he suffered last July at Celaya and Silao, when Obregón routed him so decisively. These small groups are now being driven farther and farther back

into the mountains. Inasmuch as Pablo González has destroyed the Zapata army at Cerro Gordo in the south, Carranza's forces can devote their entire attention to this last stronghold of Villa in the north. God alone knows how long they will be wrangling back and forth over this bit of Mexico. Sooner or later they will drive Villa and what is left of his army over the Sierra Madre into Chihuahua, and that will end the story. In the meantime, all the bloodshed is for nothing. This business tomorrow will be more of it, that is all."

Doña Josefa made a gesture of impatience.

"That is not what I mean, Jaime," she protested. "You know I do not understand all these Villas and Zapatas and people you are always talking about. I refer to little Chago. What does he, an ordained priest, mean by saying he will be in possession of the city?"

"Eh? True enough, I had forgotten you did not know. Your saintly little Chago is no longer a priest. He is a colonel in the army, and the stories they tell of his recklessness in battle, his courage, his cruelty . . . I assure you, it is hard even for me to believe them."

Doña Josefa clapped her hands and wrung them frantically, rocking her body from side to side.

"Did I not say so?" she cried. "Did I not say the army was not the place for a fine, sensitive soul like that? Such a spiritual child! And I warned him and begged him almost on my bended knees not to go. Something is bound to stick to him who walks where there is honey."

"Hmmm! And there is another proverb you might quote, too. He who is fated to die in darkness will do so even though his father be a candle-maker."

So they watched from the peepholes in the shutters of the front windows, the next morning, and they caught a

momentary glimpse of the reckless charge which Santiago Rojas led through the streets. Desiderio hoped some of the men of his old company, under Mónico González, might be among the incoming *villistas*.

There had been little firing. The charge had been so fierce, and had been launched from so many directions at once, that organized resistance was almost impossible. The echoes of the ten o'clock cathedral chimes had hardly died away when the wild pealing of all the bells announced the assault's successful termination.

Throughout the day, rumors flew thick and fast about the town. Soldiers were going from the home of one wealthy family to another, gathering food supplies. They had raided the storage cellars of the Hotel Richelieu. Every priest had been taken prisoner and was being held in the Seminary, where a big dinner was to be served to the clergy that evening, after which, it was said, all the priests were to be executed.

Desiderio slipped out of the house early in the afternoon and made his way to the plaza. Everything seemed to be quiet enough. There was no looting. He tried to enter the Seminary, but was halted at the carriage gate by the sentries. He could see that, within the enclosure, long tables were set up in parallel rows beneath the broad leaves of the banana plants: eight or ten rows of tables which ran the full width of the patio. In unending succession, it seemed to him, soldiers with boxes and baskets passed in through the wide archway.

He drifted toward a group of dragoons who chatted at a street corner.

"If you ask me, I think he has put himself crazy at last."

"Better not let him hear you say that, in the mood he is in today."

## THE WEDGE

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"Ah, he is not what I am afraid of. But it is bound to bring us the worst kind of luck, to mock the Church like this."

"I remember the time when you stole the silver candlesticks from the church in Lerdo yourself. I saw you do it."

"That's different. I do not say I even mind them hanging a priest now and then. But this business of mocking them all, that is not against a priest, but against the whole Church."

"Let him worry about that. What scrapes my hide is the tasks they put upon us. Not alone lugging all that food over here, and all that wine, without being allowed to drink a drop, but to round up all those girls and parade them in front of him . . ."

"What do you care? Were you afraid there would not be one left over for you?"

"Don't be like the swallows! I'll never miss my share of anything that's to be had. But imagine him sitting up there, his eyes sparkling and not a smile on those red lips, looking the girls up and down. 'Take back that hag. Are you blind that you bring me such a scarecrow?' And then: 'Ah, here's one that is the right sort. She'll do to warm the blood.' Why, he must have had no less than forty of them by the time I had to leave, and every one of them young and pretty as the bud of a flower."

"What's he going to do with forty women?"

"For that matter, what will he do with one?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know what they say, that he always picks out the best-looking one for himself, and takes her up to his quarters, but that he just pays her to let him look at her and pinch her and beat her."

"Holiest Virgin, what lunacy! If he would only turn

## THE WEDGE

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them over to us after he pays them, we would see to it that they got their money's worth, eh, *compadre?*"

"I'm already saying so. Why, they say that at Torreón one time he tore out a handful of a woman's hair. She screamed bloody murder, and he and one of the other *dorados* nearly shot each other about it."

"Ah, I do not believe it. You can hear anything. It is like when you ask when will the war be over. You can hear anything you want."

"Just the same, it is bound to bring us bad luck, this business of mocking the whole Church."

"You and your bad luck! Think of that feast we will never get so much as a smell of. Mountains of turkeys! And things in tin cans that they said were oysters."

"Oysters? I have heard of them. What do they look like?"

"What do I know? They were in cans, I tell you. Very shiny cans, with pictures on the paper around them, and a gold border. The picture was of a ship in the sea, but not of oysters. They came from the United States. The name of the place was Baltimore."

"Come, now! Sending food all that distance, and for those women to eat!"

"Yes, and all the chefs from the hotel to do the cooking, and their waiters to be over here at five o'clock to serve them."

"Will no one be there but the priests?"

"And the women, stupid. That is what he is picking them out for. I heard him give the orders. No one is to be allowed inside except the priests, who are already prisoners, and the whores, but the gates must be left open so that the whole world can pass by in the street and see the reverend fathers seated among the *gúulas* at the banquet.

There must be one woman to each priest, and they must be set like that at the table. First a priest, then a woman, then another priest, then another woman. Every priest he could catch in the city. Imagine!"

"I tell you it is sure to bring us bad luck."

"Well, we can't stand here all day. Let's go see if there isn't a swallow of aguardiente to be had somewhere."

"Yes, while they've got champagne in there by the buckets and cognac enough to swim in."

"And buried in ice, every bottle! Figure it! Was ever anything of the sort heard before? We had to dig the plants and the earth out of one of those round stone flower beds in the patio and fill up the hole with ice that we had chopped up with our bayonets, and every bottle had to be buried in chopped ice."

"What lunacy will he think of next?"

"I saw it, I tell you."

"I had to help get some of it ready."

Desiderio did not understand it all, but he caught the general drift. Don Jaime merely grunted when his son confided to him cautiously what he had heard, but at five o'clock, when the banquet in the Seminary patio was to begin, the sculptor left the house and did not return until well past dark.

"I am not a religious man, as you know," Desiderio heard him confide to one of his friends several days later, "but I tell you it gave me a shock to look into that patio and see those women sitting beside the robed priests. He and those five other *dorados* were at the center of the head table, and each of them had a girl too. And there was an orchestra in one corner. I got there just as the dinner began, and I felt sorry for some of those priests, they looked so desperately ashamed, and yet so helpless. One must bear in mind that

there are many, many good men among them. It was a fiendish thing, truly. And when he got up, just after the oysters were served, he did not need to make a gesture for silence, or clink his knife against his glass or anything. The noise was halted as if all sound had been sucked out of that patio at a single gasp. The murmur of talk and the rattle of dishes and the music were halted as the flow of water is shut off when a tap is turned. I could not hear his words, but I could tell he was making a speech. He gestured, you understand, and now and then the *dorados* would applaud. But the others, the women and the priests, they just sat there as still as death. Later on, of course, when the women got tipsy, they were pretty noisy. That was when he and the *dorados* had been shooting at the sundial high up on the wall above the . . .”

. . . . .

*Reverend buzzards, doubtless you wonder why I brought you here. It is because I wanted for once in my life to show you and the world at large what you really are. I know how you delight in the pleasures of the table. Your whole trade, as you must realize, holds no secrets from me, inasmuch as you made me one of you no longer ago than a few months. Surely your holy offices would not lose their potency in so brief a time.*

*In selecting for you the charming partners you find on either hand, I bore in mind the thought that there could be no fitter companion for a buzzard at a feast than a harpy. May you find this contact mutually stimulating. In some instances, I feel well assured, the experience is not a new one on either side.*

*You may call upon your saints, if you wish. I have no objections. Let us see if they will deliver you from*

*your embarrassment . . . What? No supplicants? I must assume, then, that you are well enough pleased with your present situation, since it is inconceivable you would have any doubts concerning the power of your holy ones to set at naught anything a poor, weak mortal like myself might be planning for you . . . Still no supplicants? Then good, let us proceed.*

*Reverend buzzards, it is my will that you eat and drink and be merry. Perhaps it is a trifle unjust to call you buzzards; unjust, I should say, to the buzzards, who have at least the decency to wait until that which they would devour has died. I am afraid you have been too mannerless to do so. You have been satisfying your gluttony on the living tissues of the people on whom you prey. What did you know of a famine? Nothing. Less than nothing. I found your clerical larders well enough stocked. Instead of enjoying this plenty in secret, as heretofore, you are to enjoy it in the sight of men—and women—as well as in the sight of God and your saints tonight.*

*And so I bid you fall to. Eat and drink heartily. To those of you who can feel shame let me say this one further word. I despise myself as heartily as I despise you, for I was one of you once. I, too, can quote Latin texts. But there is, I hasten to add, a difference. You think you have looked upon life and death because you minister to the living and the dying. That, reverend buzzards, is an error into which you have been led by the clerical seclusion of your lives.*

*Perhaps I should never have left you. Perhaps I should have kept as far from reality as you keep your saintly selves. But it is too late for that sort of speculation now. For I did come into contact with reality,*

*the planless reality of seeing good men suffer, and advising them that these sufferings of theirs—not of mine—were for some good purpose, some purpose too vast and wise to be understood by mortals.*

*Do not tell me! I know every trick phrase; every piece of the stale and rancid cant. There was a man, the father of a family, a poor devil who thought he was fighting for the cause of justice. He was broken into little pieces by the explosion of a hand grenade. And I . . . I told him that there is One who takes note of every sparrow's fall, and that . . . Bah! From my comfortable security I told broken and shattered men such stuff as that. Then, in the naked reality of my surroundings I saw myself for what I was—a buzzard. Worse than a buzzard, indeed, for a buzzard is silent, whereas I sat by, croaking to those I devoured that it was wise and good for me to be well-fed and safe while they were given up to starvation and slaughter.*

*So I made up my mind that instead of droning dead Latin prayers over the violated beauty of those mutilated bodies, I would help exact the toll of vengeance from all who had wronged them; from the enemies who had blasted them and from those who had preached to them the denial of the beauty of their bodies, who had fattened upon their sufferings and had told them that this was wise and good. The difference between us is that my eyes have been opened, and yours are still hooded by the blindfold of delusion. You will not believe me, perhaps. Yet I tell you that at this moment you are nearer to reality than ever you have been before in . . .*

*What's the matter over there? He will not eat his*

*oysters? Hold his nose, then, and drop them into his mouth one at a time. Yes, you! You red-headed pelona! Tell him what raw oysters are said to be good for in the way of revitalizing flaccid tissues. That ought to inspire him. If he gets sick, make him turn around and do not let him mess up the table. And now, some music! If I see any one refusing to eat or drink whatever is set before him, I will provide something in the way of real entertainment, in all truth. Fall to, reverend buzzards! It is a pity good old Belshazzar isn't with us tonight. He could tell you something about such feasts as this. Waiters, see that the wine glasses are well filled. I am afraid these ladies will be unable to stomach the sort of company I am foisting upon them unless their sensibilities are a bit blunted by strong drink. In other . . .*

. . . . .

*" . . . and when the turkey was served, the music started up a tango, a slow and sensuous tango, which one of the dorados danced with his whore in the narrow space between two of the tables, not moving much, you must understand, just as though the Seminary patio had been a brothel parlor. I tell you, it was a picture—that slim, dark young fellow, lithe and tall as a sapling, and in his arms a slender girl, in a shining and clinging gown . . . I was much too far away to see all the details or expressions, but if I could only have caught that rhythm, if I could only put it into wood or stone, if only I could paint that picture! There were a few electric-light bulbs on the gallery of the upper cloister, just enough to make it seem, as seen through the arch of the *zaguan*, that we were looking upon the whole thing through a mist of finely powdered gold dust, the dead black of the priestly robes, and the shimmer of the silk*

dresses the wantons wore. And he made them applaud, when the dance was finished, made them applaud until their palms must have tingled, while . . . ”

• • • • •  
*Louder, there! Louder, I tell you! That is more like it. Your Reverences demand an encore, I see by the flapping of your black wings. Then good, you shall have it. But my friends here have done enough to entertain you. One of your number must now dance the tango for us. Am I to pour good wine and meat down your insatiable gullets and get no return, as though I were one of your luckless parishioners? Who's the fattest buzzard among your Reverences? You over there, stand up. And you! Up, I say, or I'll clip off a few toes with a bullet. You doubt my marksmanship? Then look! See that? And lest there still be some who lack full conviction, let me show you that my companions are as skilful as I. At the finger of the sun-dial, lads! Any one who misses that iron bar is no man. Again! Keep on bending it upward with your bullets. Once again! Give it a shape like the tail of a figure six. And once more! Ahhh! Some of you have been drinking too much. A few of the stone numbers were chipped. All of you did not hit the bar. I ought to take your women away from you for such foul shooting.*

*But let us not forget our dance. Which of these four godly curates in whom the divine majesty delegated by Saint Peter to the Pope himself is here represented, which one of them is the fattest? . . . Yes, I suppose you are right, though it is a close matter. Into it, reverend father! Let us have no more of these maidenly hesitations. They ill befit your girth. What*

*matters the sin? You have absolved many a mortal of worse transgressions. I shall repay your mercies now by absolving you of any guilt that may attach to what you are about to do. I have the right to grant such absolution. The Church conferred this right upon me when I was ordained no longer ago than the past autumn. Thus your spirit need be torn by no doubts on that score.*

*Dominus noster Jesu Christus te absolvat; et ego, auctoritate ipsius, te absolvo ab omni vinculo excommunicationis et interdicit, in quantum possum et tu indiges. Deinde ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine patris et filii et spiritu sancti . . . Amen!*

*There! That will take care of that. Now dance! You wench in the blue dress, make him dance . . . You can't budge him? Well, I can. Stand aside . . . There! The sign of the cross in bullets at your feet. In hoc signo saltas! That moved your Reverence, didn't it? . . . Fill up another bowl of punch over there, to replace the one broken by that ricochet, and be quick about it. Another glass of wine, everybody! And you musicians, a tango now! A slow one. I want to see how his Reverence can undulate . . . and no shirking, or I'll administer unction instead of absolution to the next . . .*

. . . . .

" . . . so that after a time, you must understand, it got pretty wild. He was forcing all those people to drink, and they were not paying much attention to the custard or the coffee. Some of the priests had rolled under the table, for of course they were not accustomed to that kind of carousing; a glass of wine with their dinner and two or three more with a game of chess afterwards, yes. But this busi-

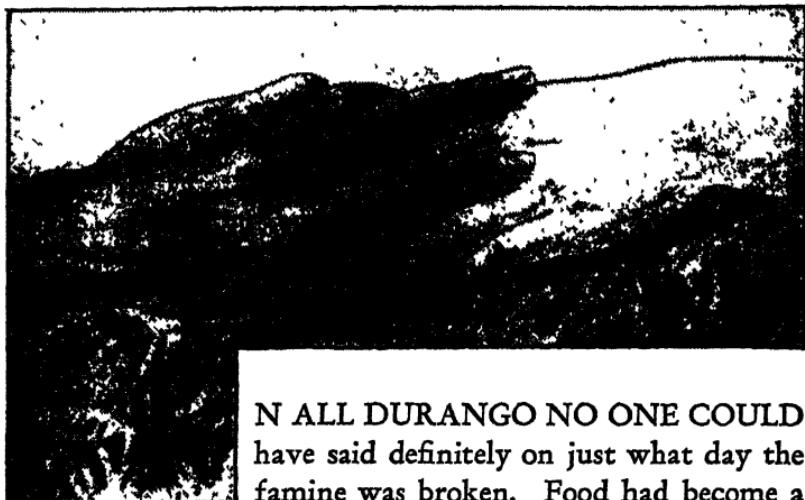
ness of absolutely drenching themselves with champagne and cognac! And they all had to drink, you understand; he kept out a sharp watch up to the very time when he excused himself, finally, saying that hard as he was, and accustomed as he might be to the revolting sights of the battlefield where sometimes the dead lay unburied for days, he found he was too squeamish to endure their company any longer. None the less, he told them they would have to remain, for he had given orders to the sentinels to shoot any who might try to leave, and he wished the harlots and the priests joy of each other and told them once again what he thought of them, after which he and the girl with the bobbed and dyed yellow hair left. At least, so it was told to me. I could hear nothing of what was said. It is difficult to get the straight of it, but it is known they went into the Seminary chapel, because later one of the other *dorados*, the one who had danced the tango, went with his girl in search of a quiet nook, and they entered the chapel themselves, which is how it was discovered that . . .”

. . . . .

*Come now, beautiful. Let us stop this playing around. I am ready to show you what it means to be in truth a man . . . Hear me, you slut, do not put on airs with me. What chapel nor what nothing! Since when did you begin to have scruples? I will make us a soft couch of altar cloths and vestments from the sacristy . . . You do not know how fortunate you are he did not choose you for himself; you would have had no enjoyment unless it gives you pleasure to have your hair fondled and perchance tugged until you shriek for help . . . in here, I tell you, and you can have your pick of all the gold and silver in the place afterward, or the jewels from the images, what does it matter to me?*

... Wait! ... Look! Look! ... Over there in the far corner ... Holiest Mary! He has ... in the name of ... this time he has done it! He told me that night when we got drunk together after the quarrel that if he ever really wearied of the shams to which he had to resort in order to convince himself that he was ... and the dust on his knees ... after he strangled her, perhaps ... Name of God! She is not dead, only unconscious, her heart still beats. Later she can perhaps tell us what ... Look, look! He must have made all the stations of the cross. That accounts for the dust on his ... you can see where he has been kneeling. And when he got to the last one, he twisted that stole into a rope and tied one end about the iron cross above the Entombment and the other around his neck, and ... Guards! Guards! Send up some men. The colonel has hanged himself ... Come, beautiful, we'll have to find some other room ...





N ALL DURANGO NO ONE COULD have said definitely on just what day the famine was broken. Food had become a little less difficult to obtain. Trains began to operate once again more or less on schedule. But to Desiderio the turning-point would always be the arrival of Don Brígido García of the Hacienda San Martín with a train of five pack-mules, each one loaded down until it seemed that its spine must give way beneath the burden of sacked corn and beans and wheat and pumpkins and cheeses.

"In honor of truth, *maestro*, that San Martín we got from you has been more wonderful than can be put into words," the rancher insisted. "From the moment he was set up in our chapel he has been absolutely ravening to work miracles. He gives himself no rest. The very first thing he did, he killed off all the grasshoppers. One day they were there in clouds and we faced ruin. The next day they were gone. Not one was left. Then my wife was delivered of twins, and I pledge you my life, hardly so much as one little pang of labor pains—and such boys! Hai! They will be wild young bucks one of these days. Then, too, there have never been so many spring lambs as last March and April; one would have thought it rained lambs overnight. And speaking of rains, not one sign of a drought did we have this year, so that our pastures remained green while all those

around us were burned brown. We talked it over, my wife and I, and we decided we must send you something to show our appreciation of the fine San Martín you made for us, and how he is on pins and needles to be working miracles all the time. Hence we loaded up the mules, and here I am. My wife made a little prayer and burned a little candle for a safe journey, and no more than look! Every one else gets robbed by the soldiers, who seemingly can smell a train of food ten leagues off. But did I worry? Indeed I did not. The miracle of bringing me through safely with my gifts is mere child's play to that San Martín of ours. He does things like that while he is resting from his real miracles."

Good things never come singly, of course. The bountiful provisions arrived only a day or two after Mónico González and his company had returned to Durango from Torreón with one of the first trains to operate over the newly re-opened line. Indeed, Mónico was visiting the sculptor's home when Don Brígido brought in his thanks-offering, and he helped the boys unload the supplies and carry them from the patio to the house. In addition to the sacks of grain and beans, there were huge pumpkins, there was a young goat as fat as butter, there were strings of dried peppers, and there were the grand cheeses of the sierra, big *quesos añejos*, "yearling cheeses"—great, thick cakes, crusted over with a fiery coating of pounded peppers, which must be kept for a year before they are eaten.

"I tell you, beloved people," said Don Jaime, smiling broadly and rubbing the palms of his hands, "the sight of all this food after what we've gone through during the past year is a good deal of a miracle in itself. We simply must celebrate this event with a feast of truly noble proportions. The situation calls for nothing else."

"We'd better be saving and make sure that there will be

something to eat in the house for at least a little while," objected Doña Josefa.

"Nonsense, *corazón*, these things were not sent to us to be hoarded, but to be enjoyed. To deny it is to fly in the face of San Martín himself. My suggestion is: let us have a picnic by the river tomorrow. We can invite a great many of our friends, and roast the goat and some of the pumpkins, and . . ."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mónico. "I'll get half a dozen of my soldiers to dig a pit. I will furnish the wagons and bring everything out there, the tortillas, the beer, everything but the goat and the pumpkins and the cheese. The alligator pears are ripe and we can pick all we want. Come, Doña Josefa, do say yes. Beatriz would enjoy it as though it were the christening of her first-born."

Don Jaime placed his right hand over his heart and bowed.

"See, we are at the feet of the señora," he declaimed theatrically. "One little word from those loveliest of lips will mean joy and happiness to so many sorely tried souls."

"Oh, go along, Jaime, and stop acting like an infant in the cradle. If I have to listen to such nonsense as this, I would rather have the picnic."

Desiderio capered about as though he were not nearly seventeen years old, completely forgetting the serious dignity with which he sought nowadays to cloak all his actions.

"Then run along now and get Beatriz," Doña Josefa suggested to Mónico. "We will slaughter and stuff the goat tonight and wrap it up for tomorrow, and after that I will . . ."

"No, you will not. You will leave everything else to me. I am going to take care of it all. I will have the *tortillas* made tonight—I know where I can lay hands on corn—and

## THE WEDGE

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I will have some of the soldiers drive the wagons and do all of the hard work."

"But come for supper, anyway. We can have some nice fresh tripe when we kill the goat, and I am sure Beatriz will enjoy a home-cooked meal instead of all that hotel food, and we can make everything ready."

"Splendid!"

"Could . . . could Toribio be one of the soldiers to go with us?" asked Desiderio.

"Assuredly, if you wish it."

"Never mind about that, Lello," his mother scolded him. "You run to the houses of our friends and tell them to be ready early in the morning."

The drive to the banks of the Río Tunal was as merry as it was otherwise uneventful. Don Jaime was in particularly fine form, and broached a bottle of *rompope* on the way out, convulsing his hearers with a long and solemn harangue on the struggle of native cheeses to retain their racial purity through the centuries. They were all packed in the wagons with the provisions, and there was a soldier to drive each cart. Mónico, Toribio, and one other soldier were on horseback.

But the fact that he was in the same wagon with Marta Tovar turned Desiderio into a vary warm and unhappy wooden image. He could not enjoy the merrymaking at all, for he was sure Marta was looking at him in a superior and secretive sort of way she had, as though she knew something she would never tell him, no matter how much he wanted her to. He had been looking forward to such a pleasant day, and now everything was spoiled. Of all people in the world, why was it that Marta, the one person he so cordially disliked, had to be where she could rob the occasion of all its gaiety?

He thought to himself: She is in for a long siege if she waits for me to ask her what she thinks she knows when she looks at me like that. Why did she have to get into this wagon with her mother when we stopped at her house? Going home things will be different. I'll wait to see what wagon she is in and then get into some other one.

His discomfort increased as he felt once more that she was looking at him in that knowing, superior way, but all he himself could do was to stare fixedly ahead, while the others kept up a brisk fire of lively chatter, exchanging jests and gossip, and exclaiming over the delights of being in the open, not to mention the prospect of the feast that awaited them.

However, once the party reached the grove where the picnic was to be held, every one had work to do. The soldiers built half a dozen fires, and at two of these the older women boiled coffee in a shallow pan and fried the eggs for breakfast. Meanwhile other soldiers dug a sizable pit while the rest heated rocks in the remaining fires to roast the goat and the pumpkins. After that, Mónico, who had been superintending the entire operation, joined the men in a stiff *copita*, while a bottle of *rompope* was served to the soldiers, and the time for rest and recreation had come.

The men went around the shoulder of the hillside to the river and swam, while the women tidied up everything and gossiped. Upon the return of the bathers, the women and girls repaired to the stream. The men lolled in the shade and talked politics, for there was much discussion everywhere nowadays as to how matters would turn out.

For once Desiderio found no flavor in the discussion. He was restless and looked often in the direction of the bend around which the women of the party had disappeared.

Finally he strolled to the tree where the soldiers lounged and squatted on the ground beside Toribio.

"Well, at last his majesty has condescended to notice that I am on the earth," the latter growled. "I thought you and I were such great friends! Is this the way to treat a *compañero*?"

"You do not know what you say," Desiderio replied with heat. "I have been busy with my parents, you saw it yourself."

"You have been too busy to speak with me, at all events, isn't it true? Well, I am no beggar for friendship. If you do not want to speak two words to a person, I do not want to speak two words to you, either."

"Don't be angry, Toribio. You know I would not do anything like that. Didn't I come over here and leave my father and Mónico González and all of them just to be with you?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"Why, I even asked Mónico specially to bring you on this picnic so that I could be with you."

"True? Well, perhaps I am mistaken, who knows? Let's forget about it. When are you going to join us again?"

"Ask your grandmother! I am to study art and become a painter instead of fighting any more. Even the general himself said so. Word of honor! But you, have you not grown tired of fighting? And what are you doing with sandals? I remember you had a fine pair of boots not so very long ago."

"Those thieves of officers! That pair of boots was too good, isn't it true? If they had been cracked and scratched, I would have them yet. But I put them on in Torreón one day, and a bit of a captain saw me limping about . . ."

"How limping?"

"My feet were too large for them. I have had tears come to my eyes when I was wearing them. But I did not mind. After all, they were magnificent boots, isn't it true? And it was not their fault that my feet were so large. They were fine. But this captain said I was ruining my feet and must give up those boots. *Ay chingao!* It was not my feet he was thinking of, but his own. Did I not see him with those boots on the very next day, swaggering up and down and twisting his mustache at the girls?"

"And you never got other shoes?"

"Yes, to be sure I did, and a good stout pair they were, too. We had taken Lerdo, and I said to myself: 'Toribio, you son of a whore, you don't dare get drunk till you have shoes!' And sure enough, I achieved it. They fit me, too. They were not boots, of course, but you must not ask too much, isn't it true? And I was wearing them that night when somebody started to shout that the *carranzistas* were upon us and we must all run. Some shots were fired, and so I started. Well, I couldn't run in shoes. I was like a cripple. So I sat down in the dark and kicked off my shoes, and after that I could run. But that was the end of the shoes. I could never find them again. So now I have made heels out of wood for my sandals—see?—because I want to get used to shoes. They look much nobbier than plain sandals, isn't it true? Of course, they are not quite the same thing as shoes, I am willing to concede that, but at least they have heels, and that is something."

"And so you expect to go right on fighting?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I am very ready to desert. There is no more fun. When you come into a town now, everybody hides, and there is nothing left to loot. Why, we have been through places where you could not even find a few hard *tortillas* that some woman might have put aside

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to bait a rat-trap. If I have to starve, then good, I'll starve. But I do not have to let people shoot at me for the privilege of starving, isn't it true? I was talking it over with Choncha just before we left Torreón. If Villa does not win a big victory soon and bring back the old days, we are going home."

Just then the women returned from the river. Desiderio rose, and with an absent nod, rejoined the elders. He did this without stopping to think, for certainly, given free choice, he would have declared emphatically that the last thing on earth he wanted was to rack himself on the embarrassment that always enveloped him when Marta Tovar was near. Even now, he could not bring himself to look at the object of his dislike, for he was afraid their glances might meet, and whenever that happened, his own gaze involuntarily dropped, to his vast disgust. Yet all this while there was a queer tingling that went all over and through him, and that tingling, though acutely discomforting, was strangely pleasurable too.

He sank into a half-hypnotic reverie, in which pictures passed before his inner vision while the scene and the people about him receded completely from his consciousness until Marta's voice roused him.

"Do not stay over there so stiff and solitary like a telegraph post," she said severely. "Come here and help me."

Startled, he looked toward the hillside where she was gathering alligator pears.

"There are some in this tree that I want, but if I shake them down, they are sure to break. Get them for me, will you?"

At first he meditated a surly refusal, but then it came to him that here was an opportunity to impress his superiority

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upon one who ordinarily seemed so disdainful. With an elaborate show of indifference he loitered toward her.

"Which ones do you want?" he demanded, gratified by the gruffness he managed to get into his voice.

"Do not put yourself like a bear with an aching tooth, either. You don't expect me to climb trees, do you?"

Once more the feeling of helplessness that always seemed to possess him in her presence took hold on him, and instead of saying something scornful about not expecting her to do much of anything, he merely shook his head dumbly.

"Up there," she pointed out.

He swung himself into the tree with the agility of a raccoon; and an aguacate is not easy to climb, because the bark is smooth and affords no trustworthy footholds. One after another he passed the shining green fruits down to her, until she said there were enough.

"Wait a minute," he urged, suddenly bold. "There is one up above here that is perfect. It is as ripe as can be, and that one will be for you . . . I mean for anybody that wants it."

"Be careful."

He felt strangely thrilled by the solicitude in her tone. But he would show her. He made his way upward so recklessly that he jarred the ripe pear loose and it fell to the stony ground, where it burst almost like an exploding shell, and scattered its creamy pulp far and wide.

"Oh, it is spoiled! What a pity!"

Desiderio's cheeks burned as he slid down to earth, stammering excuses. His distress was so obvious that Marta took pity.

"Never mind, Lello," she assured him. "It was not your fault. I did not really care anything about that one, any-

way. And besides, there are heaps of others. It was good of you to help me."

He mumbled indistinctly.

"Do not be silly," she laughed. Quite suddenly he thought her laughter enchanting. "Help me carry the alligator pears back. It will soon be time for lunch, and my mother wants to make a *guacamole* with these and with the peppers she is roasting."

He scuffed the toe of one shoe about the gravelly soil, because something had happened to him when he heard Marta laugh, and while he had no idea what it was, he very definitely wanted to feel again the sudden delight that had enveloped him a moment ago. Rather vaguely he was aware that this could only happen when he and Marta were alone.

"I'll help you carry them," he agreed.

"Then come."

"But wait a minute."

"You're a funny boy."

"Well, but . . . but I want to ask you something."

"Can't you ask me while we carry back the alligator pears to my mother?"

"It is about after lunch."

"What about after lunch?"

"I wanted to ask you . . . we might gather some herbs for our mothers then, don't you think?"

"To be sure, if you want to."

"And perhaps pick some flowers?"

"How not?"

"Then good. But . . . but why must we go back now?"

"My mother is waiting for these alligator pears."

He sighed resignedly. He knew what would happen. His emancipation from the thraldom of embarrassment would be revoked. He was not yet quite sure how this present free

state of mind of his had been attained, but he knew that once they rejoined the others he would again turn into a warm wooden image. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no help for it.

The moment the alligator pears had been delivered, Desiderio drew as far away as he could from Marta, lest any one suspect him of harboring a desire to be near her. So pointed was he about it, that Doña Josefa noticed it and frowned.

"Have you and Marta been quarreling?" she asked.

Marta quickly came to his rescue.

"Indeed and truly, we have not, Doña Josefa," she asserted. "Lello helped me get aguacates for my mother. I never could have done it without him. He is so strong."

Then and there, had Marta Tovar wanted his scalp for a penwiper, she could have had it for the mere asking. "He's so strong!" One of these days he would show her some real feats of strength. He looked unseeingly toward the place where, under Mónico's direction, the soldiers were taking roast food from the fire pits.

"Don't you want to come over and watch, *mocosito*?" Toribio bellowed cheerfully.

Desiderio shuddered. *Mocosito!* Right before Marta! She could not have missed hearing the shameful word. He would like to slice Toribio's flesh from its bones in small shreds.

"No, I do not want to watch," he snarled; and then he hated himself for having done so, because Toribio looked so hurt and surprised. He had meant no harm. But, Name of God! *Mocosito!* Right before Marta Tovar!

However, Marta gave no sign that anything was amiss. She piled his plate high with food and he made a brave show of eating it, though he was anything but hungry. He would have liked to get off all by himself and stare at the

sky through the lacework of twigs and leaves; stare straight up into that blue radiance till he lost himself in it. That would be a marvelous thing, to be up there, just floating around as part of all that shining glory, and for Marta to be up there too, so they could float near to one another. Such visions were much more interesting than food.

When the *canelo* was served for dessert—that was the roast pumpkin with brown sugar—Marta fixed him a special slice, hollowing out a receptacle in the syrupy pulp, and filling it with milk from the big jug that Mónico had brought from town. Ordinarily this was one of his favorite sweetmeats, but so impatient was he now that he could do no more than toy with it. “He’s so strong!” She should see. He would show her that very afternoon. He would scale a cliff to bring her a white flower shaped like a star, a flower that he could lay at her feet.

“Don’t you want some herbs, Mama?” Marta was asking. “I saw some of the loveliest ones this morning.”

“Why, yes, child, that will be nice,” Doña Enriqueta agreed readily.

“Come, Lello, you must help me pick them.”

He arose, sternly cloaking his feelings with a mask of unwillingness, and they strolled away together along the hillside. For a time they were intent upon gathering the herbs of which every housewife likes to have an abundant supply—*yerbanis*, *gobernadora*, *oreja de ratón*, and the like—and they did not talk. But Desiderio found this silence intensely satisfying. It was not the same as it had been on other occasions, when he had been tortured by the secretive, knowing glances with which Marta seemed always to be regarding him. There was a comforting suggestion of shared intimacy in their present wordless association.

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"Those will be enough for a year," Marta said at last, surveying the great bundle of herbs.

Desiderio smiled.

"Why don't you sit down now, sort out your *yerbitas*, and rest?" he suggested.

"And what will you be doing?"

"You will learn in time. Only you must not look, because it is going to be a big surprise."

"A surprise? For me?"

"For whom else?"

"For your mother, perhaps."

"No, this surprise is going to be for you," he assured her so earnestly that she laughed softly, the same laugh which had delighted him so hugely before, and which now struck him dumb with rapture for a moment.

"All right, but do not leave me all by myself. Nobody knows what could run up to frighten me, a lizard, perhaps. I am afraid of anything that crawls."

"They will not hurt you. But I will cut you a little stick so that you can drive them away."

He found that he gloried in her very timorousness, and he thought to himself: This is a strange thing, because only a short time ago I would have laughed at her for being afraid of a lizard, and I would have teased her about it. Now I am glad she is afraid of such things, because that shows how different we are. When I was a child and she was a little girl, I would have laughed, and I would have teased her because I would have expected her to be like me. Now I am a man and I am glad she is not like me.

Meanwhile he was industriously picking four-o'clocks, red ones and white ones, until his hat was full of the delicate, fragile blooms. Then he sat down beside Marta and skillfully threaded them into a garland, a *corona* in which the

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white and red alternated. When it was finished, he handed it to her.

"Put it on, Marta," he urged. "This is the surprise."

"What beauty! But you must put it on for me. You made it, and you know how it ought to go."

Quaking inwardly, yet with a fine outward show of non-chalance, he set the wreath atop her blue-black, smoothly drawn hair, and leaned back to admire the effect.

"Is it becoming?"

"Oh, well, it is all right," he replied diffidently. "I am not very good at this making of *coronas*. The ones my sister makes are beautiful. But, yes, it is all right."

Then his heart missed a beat and resumed its functions with something like violence. His mouth felt as though he had tasted oversugared preserves. Their hands had touched on the ground. He was afraid to move. He hardly dared breathe. Did she know their hands were touching? Perhaps not, and when she found out that he did not draw his hand away, she would be angry and would go back to the others. But if he left his hand where it was, perhaps she would not notice. Motion might merely serve to call the difficulty to her attention. And suddenly he knew she was aware of the contact. It was not a matter of reasoning, he simply knew it. And she did not draw away. She was not angry.

"Some time," he blurted ecstatically, "I am going to tell you something."

"Tell me now."

"No, I can't. But it is something very, very important, and some time I will tell you."

"Some time soon?"

"Assuredly."

"Very soon?"

"Well . . . soon."

"Then perhaps . . . then . . ."—Marta's voice was little more than a whisper—" . . . then . . . maybe I will tell you something too."

That was quite enough to burst any breast. It made further speech impossible. But no matter. Words were superfluous now. For the rest of the afternoon Desiderio merely existed in a sort of celestial state of suspension, in which he had become a formless part of the vast delight that was all the universe. It struck him some time later that he had not the faintest idea of when or how this condition had been brought to an end.

Without warning, he found himself back with the others, getting into the wagons for the homeward drive in the gathering dusk. As the procession got under way with a great jingling and creaking of harness, Desiderio wished with all his soul that he, too, were on horseback, so that Marta would see and remember him as a dashing figure. But of course Mónico would never exchange places with him. Perhaps Toribio . . .

He leaned out from the side of the wagon and beckoned violently to that stalwart.

"*Compadre*, come to me; I have something to ask."

Toribio cantered up, regarding the boy sourly.

"I suppose it's a favor you want, isn't it true?"

"Well, I wanted you to let me ride your horse for a while."

"Didn't I know it? Didn't I say you wanted something, or you would still be putting yourself like a miracle-working saint in his niche."

"Toribio," the boy pleaded with agonizing earnestness, "if you will let me ride your horse, I'll give you this tie."

"What tie nor what eye of an ax!" the soldier scoffed.

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"What do I want of a tie? Besides, a tie alone is not enough. I want one of those horseshoe pins with red and white jewels too. They are very fine, isn't it true?"

"But I haven't any pin!"

"And you haven't any affection for your friends, either, when there isn't something you want to get out of them. In the field, when you needed somebody to take care of you, old Toribio was all right. But now, in front of all your fine city friends, you do not want to be seen with me. Anybody would have thought I had the pest when I called to you to watch us with the roast."

"But, Toribio," whispered Desiderio desperately, "you . . . you called me a *mocosito*, right out in front of . . . in front of everybody. I am no child. I am a man now, isn't . . . isn't it true?"

"And you couldn't let an old friend call you that? Well, you haven't enough tie-pins to get me to let you ride my horse. But . . . but . . . I will let you ride him for nothing. Come on, *compadrito*, hop out of that wagon. I will climb onto one of the beasts in the shafts. Don't you think I have eyes in my head? You want her to see you on a horse. Am I right?"

"Oh, Toribio, I'll never forget this. Never! You are my very best friend. You always were and you always will be."

"You do not need to thank me. My leg is sore, I do not want to ride anyway, otherwise I would not have let you have my horse at all."

Desiderio swung into the saddle and cantered beside the wagon where the Tovars rode. He did not show off his mount or make it prance. He just sat very straight in the saddle and hoped that he looked as tall and as fine as he felt.

At the Tovar home, where the wagons made their first stop, he dismounted to assist Doña Enriqueta and Marta to

the ground. A wisp of lacy white on the floor of the cart caught his eye, but he kept his own counsel. Not until the procession reached the door of his father's house, and he surrendered his mount to Toribio, did he make any comment about it.

"Look, Mama, Doña Enriqueta has left her handkerchief. I had better run over there with it and give it back to her. I will be gone no more than a minute."

"Is that Enriqueta's handkerchief?" asked his mother. "It seems to me it belongs to Marta."

"Well, perhaps it does. I do not know. I thought it was Doña Enriqueta's. Anyway, I had better take it back to them."

"Do not be long; it is late enough as it is."

At the Tovar door he knocked shyly.

"My . . . my mother asked me to return this handkerchief," he stammered awkwardly. Marta was nowhere to be seen. "It was left in the wagon."

"Thank you, Lello," said Doña Enriqueta. "It is Marta's, and she will thank you, too, the next time she sees you. She was worn out with the fatigue of the day, and has retired. She is not a very strong girl. Won't you stop for a bite of supper?"

"No, thank you, Doña Enriqueta," he murmured. "My mother awaits me. At the feet of the señora."

He wished he could have seen Marta again. He wanted to see her now, he told himself over and over as he walked slowly in the direction of his home. Already it seemed an unconscionably long time since he had laid eyes on her. Perhaps, if he went back to the Tovar house, he might see a light in her window. That would be something. Otherwise he would not see her again for ever and ever so long. Of course, he would be able to see her at church, and per-

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haps at the *serenata* Sunday night. But, even so, it would be so long until Sunday. It would soon be an hour since he had seen her, and then it would be a whole day, and then . . . something would have to be done about this.



OCHITL NOW BECAME AN IMPORTANT figure in Desiderio's eyes, though, fortunately for her own peace of mind, she remained in ignorance of this sudden promotion to a commanding position in his cosmos. Through his sister's unwitting cooperation the boy was enabled to tap a source of information in quest of which he had been conducting what were really some almost frantic researches. From the neat packet of correspondence he found in a little casket on her dressing-table he drew the source-material of his letter to Marta Tovar.

Aware that a wooer is expected to send such notes to the girl of his choice, he had been obsessed with the need for writing this *carta amorosa*. Custom decreed it. Custom also made it mandatory that the transmission of such communications be tricked out in an elaborate investiture of secrecy, a sort of conspiratorial and "Hist! Hist!" atmosphere. Farther than this, however, Desiderio's knowledge of the proprieties did not extend.

He could not imagine himself, for example, soberly chronicling for Marta's edification the fact that this had been a nice day, that he had made such and such sketches at the Arroyo studio, that his mother was well. On the other hand, when he tried to translate into words the cloudy

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ardors that possessed him whenever he thought of Marta, he found himself hemmed in by lack of adequate phraseology. He shrewdly surmised that Arroyo was in a position to render expert assistance, but the idea of asking him or any one else for advice was not even thinkable.

The solution lay in the casket on Xochitl's dressing-table. Waiting until his sister had left the house, he slipped into her room and made a systematic search, which ended when he chanced upon certain packets of letters he had felt reasonably certain he would find somewhere about the chamber. He went through them quite impersonally, unconscious of the least impropriety, apprehensive of discovery only because of a foreboding that this might bare his infatuated estate to the world. His sole reaction to the glowing sentences he picked out here and there from these missives was a joyous realization that here at last was precisely what he had been seeking. Now he could send Marta a proper letter.

The first composition was copied half a dozen times before he was satisfied with the result, which, he had decided, must be free from blots, erasures, or other blemishes. In fact, he all but exhausted the several sheets of special notepaper purchased secretly for this purpose, before he managed to achieve a fair draft to his captious liking. This he placed in an envelope and sealed, a step he began immediately to regret; for he was torn by doubts as to what undisclosed errata might still remain. Moreover, charmed by the end-product of his labors into a sort of literary narcissism, he yearned to gloat over it again and yet again.

It did not occur to him to slit the envelope, re-scan his work, and place it in a fresh cover. Once the packet intended for Marta was sealed, it became sacred. Not even he could tamper with it after that. Shakily he scrawled on the

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outside of the envelope the words: *Señorita Marta Tovar*, never suspecting that the cover should have been left quite blank, since he would deliver his opus in person. He was inordinately proud of this firstling of his. It read:

*Señorita:*

*From the first moment in which my eyes beheld you, my heart has remained in the keeping of yourself. From that moment on, all of my actions and all of my thoughts have been accompanied by a beautiful vision of your so ideal person. Without doubt you will laugh over the pretensions of this poor and unworthy slave of yours. There being nothing further, I remain your affectionate, attentive and devoted servitor,*

DESIDERIO TRIANO DE PARRA

P.S.—*One single word from you would be the salvation of this stricken heart, which suffers the tortures of doubt as to whether its love is returned. Recollections of the first time my eyes had the happiness of beholding you fill my days with pleasure and my nights with the desire of gazing upon your so ideal image. Day after day I tell myself how unworthy I am of being cherished by you. I know that your kindness is of a magnitude capable of forgiving my boldness, but I want you to know that within this humble heart there is enclosed a love which is immense and sincere, and which never will be appeased as long as I do not receive that one word of yours. Cheerfully I would lay down my life for your most insignificant whim. Anxiously I await your reply. My heart palpitates at the thought of you. Your slave at your feet, who*

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*kisses your hand—your most affectionate, attentive  
and devoted servitor,*

DESIDERIO TRIANO DE PARRA

*P.S.—Don't tell your mother or mine about this  
letter.*

DESIDERIO TRIANO DE PARRA

He had culled from nearly a dozen different missives various phrases he regarded as beautiful, and had thus combined them into a single epistle. But it was akin to an agony to carry the envelope about in his pocket until Sunday. He imagined every one could see what he bore, and he lived in the liveliest dread of having crowds follow him, shouting in derisive chorus that he had a *carta amorosa* in his pocket.

This dread was still with him when he went to the plaza for the Sunday night *serenata*. Inconspicuous in the shadow of the thunder trees that bordered the square, he could see Marta as she walked with two of her friends, laughing and tittering over their sprightly chatter. At what he deemed to be the proper moment he left his retreat and struck off boldly across the plaza, as though bound for a definite objective on the opposite side.

His timing had been excellent. The encounter seemed so veritably the result of the merest chance, that he could lift his hat with a tremulously casual "Good evenings!" which appeared to be addressed impartially to all three of the girls. In the ensuing momentary pause, while he waited to let them pass so that he might continue his brisk walk across the square without impropriety, he slipped the sealed envelope into Marta's hand. Without a glance to either side, he marched off and lost himself once more in the shadows. Then he turned swiftly, in time to see Marta tuck something

into the bosom of her dress. Aflame with a delightful embarrassment, he sped homeward at once.

All week he could think of nothing but whether there would be an answer from Marta the next Sunday night. How would she deliver it? Certainly nothing on earth could bring him to confront her publicly.

"What ails you, Lello?" Arroyo asked him. "Do you not feel yourself well? You act like a sick kitten that is looking forlornly about in search of a nice warm stone against which it might cuddle for comfort."

"No, I am all right, *maestro*," he replied.

On Thursday evening his mother asked him to take a prayer-book to Doña Enriqueta.

"I . . . I am busy with something . . . I can't go out . . . some other time I will take it," he stammered miserably. Just suppose he were brought face to face with Marta at this juncture!

"What's the matter? Are you sick?" his mother inquired sharply.

Why did every one think he was sick?

"No, I feel well. It was just . . ."

"Then, take the prayer-book to Doña Enriqueta this very instant. You are not too big to have your ears boxed when you put yourself like a baby."

He took the book and left the room. Desperate, he went to his father's studio and called Epitacio, who was at work there.

"Mother says for you to take this book over to the Tovars," he invented glibly.

"Why didn't she tell you to take it?" demanded Epitacio.

"What do I know? She just told me to give it to you and tell you to take it to Doña Enriqueta."

"Well, I don't see why she should send you to me

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first," Epitacio began suspiciously. "I think I'll ask her whether . . ."

"I tell you what I will do," Desiderio interrupted, panic-stricken. "I'll walk over there with you, if you wish. Come on."

"Well . . . all right, then. Come on."

They covered the short distance within a space of minutes.

"You go ahead," Desiderio urged when they got to the corner of the block where Marta lived. "I will wait for you here."

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you come to the door too? Are you sick?"

"No, I am not sick. I will wait over here."

"I think you must be crazy."

"I will wait over here," Desiderio repeated stubbornly.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief when his brother went on. That had been a narrow escape. Suppose he had seen Marta! On the other hand, suppose Epitacio should guess what the real reason for his reluctance had been! Suppose he told every one at home that Desiderio would not go to the Tovar door because he had been afraid to meet Marta!

If Epitacio did anything like that, he would kill him. Better yet, he would kill himself. He would drown himself in the pools at the foot of Cerro de los Remedios, and when his body was found they would all be sorry and they would cry. Maybe Marta would cry too; maybe she would pine away because she had driven her adorer to end it all in a watery grave. She would put herself more and more pale every day. She would tell no one of the secret sorrow that was gnawing at her heart, but when she was alone she would whisper to herself: "Soon, soon it will all be over. Then we shall be joined in death."

Fortunately the unimaginative Epitacio seemed to have nothing of any moment on his mind when he rejoined his brother for the short homeward walk, but went directly back to the studio to resume his interrupted work.

Long before the initial bars of music opened the *serenata* program the following Sunday night, Desiderio stood sentry beneath one of the thunder trees at a point which Marta would have to pass in approaching the plaza. Would she notice him there in the darkness? If she did, would she pass by, giggling over the pretensions of this unworthy and presumptuous heart? Or would she slip an answering note into his hand? On one point he was resolved. Under no circumstances would he move from the tree. He said this to himself almost fiercely as he saw her approach the plaza with her two friends. Either she gave him the answer here or he would leave and pine away of unrequited love, if that was what she wanted. But he would not go out into the open and let all the world see him receive a note from a girl.

He stared fixedly at Marta's approaching form, as though to let her know by the unwavering intensity of his gaze where he was to be found. Apparently this had no effect. Though she passed within inches of him, she did not so much as turn her head. The hand he had already begun to raise toward his hat brim dropped to his side. And just then there was thrust into it a bit of paper.

He stood as he was for half a dozen long and slightly labored breaths, not moving a muscle. Then he made off into the darkness at full tilt. He stopped at a lighted corner, and with trembling, awkward fingers fumbled at the note. But a group of pedestrians appeared at the next street intersection, strolling toward the plaza. Hastily he crumpled the sheet of paper, thrust it deep into his pocket, and hur-

## T H E W E D G E

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ried home. There he took a candle and made his way up to the roof, the only retreat where he might feel reasonably safe from interruption. Secure in this isolation, he read:

*Lello:*

*I think you are a very foolish boy, even if you are so nice. You should not write such things. Why do you not come to the eleven o'clock mass at the Analco Church next Sunday?*

MARTA

Rapturously he blew out the candle and sat there in the darkness of the unlighted house-top. She had answered him. She had said he was nice. She had—and this was tantamount to a direct invitation—indicated he should meet her at the church she would attend with her mother the following Sunday morning. After the mass he would walk home with them.

Blissfully he stared at the slim crescent of the young moon.

So this was love!



E WAS ALONE UNDER THE TREE. Surely, then, it had been a dream. Yet even while he thus argued with himself he knew he merely sought to make plausible something palpably unworthy of belief. As he stared into the tangle of twigs and green leaves he heard once more the song of the birds, the purl of water in the little orchard *acequia*. He caught the play of light and shadow, the aimless straying of little breezes in the foliage, the shrill noonday mockery of a cicada, all the sights and sounds previously obliterated by the tempest that had engulfed him.

He raised his head. Marta crouched by the side of the *acequia* and busied herself with something white, washing and rinsing. A surge of revulsion seized him. He turned to pillow his forehead on crossed forearms. How could he ever face her now?

Then he thought: So this is what it means. This is what Arroyo has in his eyes when he talks to the new models at the studio.

Fierce denial flamed into his consciousness. He thought: No! No! A lie! It was not like that at all. This was not something I planned, this was something that happened

to me; something so wonderful that it has linked Marta to me as no two persons were ever linked before. This is a secret. Our secret. No one else can possibly share it. When I used to think of new experiences, of seeing new places, I did not dream there was anything like this . . . But if only she would stop that laundering!

How had it come about? What had brought them to this secluded corner of the orchard back of the big orphanage? He had not been like Arroyo, wheedling and ogling for favors. He had been caught up and swept away by a tenderness that became a tumult. There had been an aching desire to put his arm about her; her lips had fastened themselves to his and had clung there like leeches, draining him; his pounding blood had clamored for liberation . . .

He cast a frightened look toward the *acequia*.

"Marta!" he whispered.

She glanced over her shoulder, wringing out the stuff she was washing, and smiled.

"I'll be through in a minute or two," she assured him brightly. "When this has dried a little, we can go back home. There is more than enough time. Mother did not expect us so very soon."

Bitter hatred momentarily dispelled the tenderness that suffused him. How could she be so matter-of-fact, so casual? Perhaps he was not the first to whom she had given herself. Something she had said, a sureness in the way she had borne herself from the beginning . . . but no, that would be unthinkable. That was . . . and yet . . .

It was Marta who had feigned the faintness that had given them this hour or two to themselves. It seemed now so long ago, like something that had happened to some one else, all those delightful little intrigues and stratagems.

When he found out that she and her mother invariably attended the eleven o'clock mass at the Analco Church he had gone there himself . . . three weeks ago, four weeks ago, in another life that now lay far behind.

He had thought himself so clever when he arranged matters so that he all but collided with Marta and her mother that first time, elaborately explaining that Arroyo had sent him to this section of the city with a message about an appointment.

"I am early, I have nothing to do for a time before I can deliver the message. May I not carry your chairs for you?"

Doña Enriqueta made no objection.

"If you are quite sure you have the time, Lello. We must hurry home. I have left all the food on the stove, it will be ruined if we do not return immediately."

And he had taken the two folding chairs with their seats of bright brocade, had carried them proudly as he walked home with Marta and her mother, making capital of the fact that "we" were so busy at the studio these days, there were so many portraits "we" had to paint, that even on Sundays one had to worry with appointments for a sitting. He felt certain he must have made quite an impression.

The next Sunday it had been the same, and then Marta had been sick the following week. But the Sunday after that she had come to church again. With a start he realized that this had been that very morning. And after mass, when he ran into them in the portico of the Analco Church by chance—oh, quite by chance!—she complained of feeling faint.

"I do not see how I can walk home without stopping to rest first, Mama."

"God help me, what's to be done? I must hurry home—

## THE WEDGE

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you know I always put the food to the fire before we leave for mass. The whole dinner will be spoiled."

"You and Lello walk on ahead, Mama. I will sit over there on one of the benches in the little park until I feel rested. Then I will follow you slowly."

"Poor child, it distresses me to leave you. Suppose you should fall ill all alone here."

"But I do not feel ill, truly. I merely stand in need of a rest."

"I will return after I walk home with your mother," Desiderio offered hopefully. "Then I can walk with you and be of help on the way."

He had hurried back so swiftly, prey to all sorts of misgivings as to what might have happened to Marta in the meantime.

"Goodness, Lello, you must have been running, you are all out of breath."

"I was afraid you might need help."

"No more than that? I hoped you would say you hurried so as to be with me that much sooner."

He could not make it out. Something was definitely queer about the whole thing. Why should she be the one to be plaguing him? Certainly she did not act like an invalid who, but a few moments ago, had felt too faint to put one foot before the other.

"I . . . that is . . . do you feel rested enough to start now? Your mother will be worrying."

"Oh, if you are just trying to get rid of me."

"Marta, you know I would not do that."

"Then come walk with me slowly by these lovely gardens. We have plenty of time. Mother will know it will take us ever so long to get home. She will not be expecting us until much later."

He felt numbly ill at ease, despite the inexplicable heightening of the tingling flush her nearness always brought with it. Her hand lay confidently on his arm, and he was proud to have it so, but self-consciousness kept him awkward.

"You did not send me another letter last Sunday."

"Well, the last time you were sick. I knew you would not come to the *serenata* that Sunday."

"So then you took the letter and gave it to some other girl, I suppose."

Desiderio could not make it out. This new captiousness, this effort to put him into the wrong about nothing, what could it mean? Had he done something to make her angry?

"It . . . I . . . Do not talk about the letter, Marta. Not here, at least. You said yourself it was foolish."

"Then you did not mean all those pretty things you wrote me, did you?"

"Of course I did. Every word."

"I thought when I read it you could not mean them. It looked as though you must have had long enough practice in writing things like that. The same things you tell every girl. I know."

"Marta, I never wrote a letter like that before in my whole life."

"I do not believe you."

"I swear it, Marta."

Somehow they had turned in at the back gate of the big orchard behind the orphanage garden. Desiderio could not recall having passed through the portal, but he was so distressed, and so stirred by the beginnings of a vague anger, a feeling that he wanted to seize the girl and shake her till she stopped her evident attempt to irritate and goad him, that he paid little attention to his surroundings.

The orchard was deserted at this hour. When he real-

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ized where they were he had a curious sort of feeling that they stood alone in all the universe; that they had barred out the world from a haven no one else could enter. They sat down on the turf beneath the gnarled branches of one of the big apple trees.

"You are like all the others, you swear this and you swear that, but you do not really mean it a bit."

"And you are laughing at me, that is all. You think it was a funny letter, or you would not be teasing me so about it. You would not be talking of it at all . . . not out here in the daytime . . . when I just want to be with you, and looking at you."

She fixed her eyes on him with that old secretive, knowing look that had once so roused his dislike.

"Indeed I am not teasing, Lello. Truly. I no more than wanted to know if you really meant all those things you said."

"And . . . Marta . . . if I did?"

"I would feel very, very happy."

She turned toward him, and the look in her eyes was not secretive.

"Marta . . . Marta . . ."

He was caught up and swept away by the pain of a tenderness that became a tumult, that clamored to be appeased . . . and now she was smiling at him brightly from the bank of the *acequia*, and the tone of her voice when she spoke was the same as though nothing whatever had happened.

"Come, Lello. Time to go."

He tried to look up at her, and could not. She was so casual . . . surely if this was something that had never happened to her before she could not be acting like that, she could not have been so deft in bringing him here to

this orchard, so certain now as to what had to be done.

"What's the matter, Lello? Do not be like that. I am not sorry, truly. I am glad. It means we belong to each other, doesn't it?"

He nodded dumbly. It ought to mean that. But how could she talk about it openly that way? Couldn't she sense that this was something holy and hushed between them, something for whispers at twilight, murmurs beneath the stars? Here in the bald sunshine it would become naked, ugly, bawdy, like the routine amours of Arroyo at the studio . . . like Arroyo, just another one . . .

Well, there was nothing for it. He must face her somehow, walk home with her as though everything were still the same. He forced himself to press her hand when they parted at the door of her home.

"Write me another sweet letter and bring it to me at the *serenata* tonight, my life," she whispered, and added: "Always and always, Lello."

He turned and struck off blindly toward the *mezquital* beyond the city, seeking refuge from himself. Without aim he wandered through the bush all that long afternoon, trying to think and yet flinching from thought; tremulous with desire to see Marta, to put his arms about her, and yet resolved never to see her again; exultant with fulfilment, burning with shame.

He had to face his family, later, but this ordeal he bore stolidly. On one point his mind was made up. He would not go to the *serenata*, he would work in his father's studio. No, he did not want to be reminded of a studio. He would sit alone on the roof of the house where there would be none to see him, none before whom he felt he must dissemble.

But there was a moon, a big moon, the kind that all

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Mexico describes as "a moon to leave mothers a-weeping." It kindled a fire in his veins. He could not remain there by himself, staring into the fluid silver of the sky, in his ears the shrill mockery of the cicadas. Suddenly he wanted to see Marta, to whisper a few sweet words to her. No matter what had happened before today, there had been today, there was something that linked them and . . . and . . . there was no time for a letter. Moreover the situation was one which called for something more than pen and paper. He hastened to the plaza, toward the lights and the music and the crowds. Marta was with the two girls who usually accompanied her at the *serenata*. He paused at her side for a moment.

"If I come to the bars of your window tonight," he began in a low murmur, "will you . . ."

But her laughter rang out, gay and untroubled, and he winced from it as from a lash. He did not know she was trying to make it appear he had merely made a casual, merry remark.

He fell back, joined the opposite circle, and lost himself in the shadow of the thunder trees. He had been right. To her it was just something coarse, like the talk of the soldiers about their campfires, like the wheedling blandishments of Arroyo's studio. He would never again set eyes on her. If that was what all women were like . . .

"*Quiubole, compadrito?* I have been looking everywhere for you."

Startled, he turned to find Toribio at his elbow.

"What's the matter?"

"I came to bid you good-by. I have been searching the whole town for you to say good-by."

"Are you going to desert?"

"Not yet, though I have had it in my mind for a long

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time now, isn't it true? The case is, the regiment leaves tonight."

"The whole column? Where are you going?"

"Hush! Not so loud. It is very secret. But we are going north again, always north."

"What has happened?"

"El Prieto has learned the *carranzistas* have received reinforcements. They attack tomorrow or next day. We leave at midnight."

"Running away before a fight?"

"What do I know? They never ask me, isn't it true? It is always, 'Do this!' or 'Do that!' and a malediction to go with it. But Perico says Villa is concentrating all of his men in the north, in Chihuahua, and who knows? Anything can happen."

"Toribio. Listen well. You are my friend, my good friend, are you not?"

"Why, you are one of my eyeballs, isn't it true?"

"Then do this. Have another horse ready for me, so that I can go with the column when it leaves tonight. Toribio, will you do it?"

"You mean you will go out with us tonight? Take the field with us once more?"

"Yes, yes. I must get away. I . . . I have deep trouble. Will you help me?"

"But, look here now, little friend, you know we are in retreat. It is not like it used to be. There are no good times any more. It is drill and drill and drill, and little to eat and no looting at all. You remember, I have been saying I was myself ready to desert, isn't it true?"

"I know all that, yes. To me it does not matter. Will you have a horse ready for me, without saying anything to any one? Once we are gone, when Mónico finds out, he

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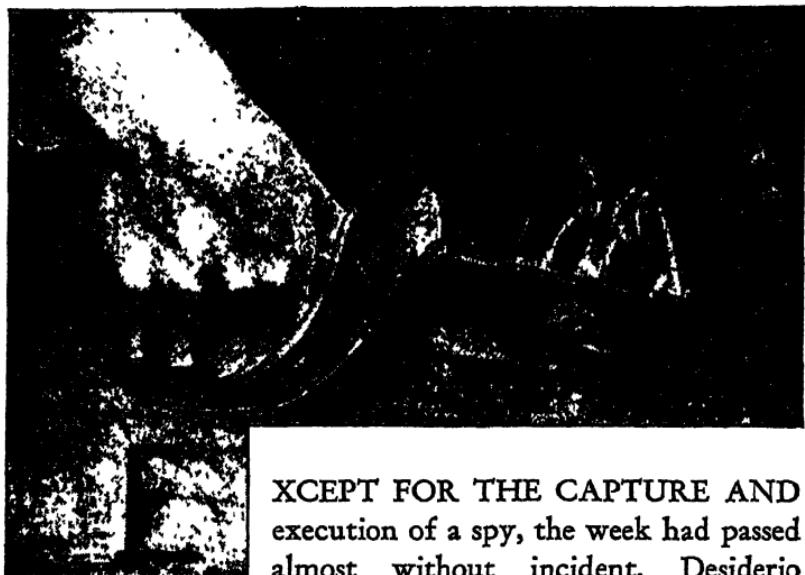
will not send me back. If he does, I will just go somewhere else."

"Hmmm! A horse, eh? That should not be so difficult, at least not for a man like myself who knows his way about. That could arrange itself—you know how I am, I get what I want once I put my mind to it. Meet me at the railroad station in two hours. We take a special train north at midnight. In fact, I will steal a couple of blankets and a rifle for you, too. You know my sort—I do not do things by halves, isn't it true?"

"Why in two hours? Where are you going now?"

"To get ready for everything. I only came down to the plaza to try to find you so that I could say farewell."

"Then there is no need to meet you later. I go with you now. No, not across the plaza. Around this way. Come, Toribio, let's be moving."



EXCEPT FOR THE CAPTURE AND execution of a spy, the week had passed almost without incident. Desiderio learned something of the difficulties besetting him who seeks escape from himself; difficulties which, in this instance, were multiplied by the routine inactivity of life in barracks. For the first day or so, the mere fact of flight had served as a sort of anodyne, but when this numbness had worn off, he looked ahead into an endless monotony, and the prospect appalled him.

"Do you never feel the need to do something different, to see a new place?" he burst out one night when a group of them squatted about a campfire with the warmed-over food that made up their supper.

"If you're not satisfied," jeered El Perico, "why not telegraph my General Villa that his plan of campaign displeases you? Without doubt, he will drop everything to comply with your wishes."

"That is no answer. Look, I am not a little child. I did not realize it before, but the thing cannot keep on like this. If we just keep on going north and going north, it will all have to disband. And then what becomes of your holy cause?"

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"Stop cracking your skull about the holy cause. If it has done nothing more, it has cast down the haughty ones from high places, as I always said it would, and as long as we are in the field, they cannot return. Let's go down to the cantina of El Recuerdo del Futuro and see what goes on."

It had been like that ever since the detachment had reached Tepehuanes. Day followed day. Always the same. A bugle call to rouse the camp at five o'clock in the morning. Those who were not on guard duty gathered at the parade-ground for three hours of desultory drill. Then breakfast. After that, nothing.

There were card games and dice games and cock fights and *balera* tournaments. Some of the men busied themselves with the weaving of horsehair bridles and hatbands, making buckles and other ornaments out of silver coins. Others made horsehair rings or tiny baskets to be sold to curio-seekers. Others carved monkeys out of peach-pits. Supplies were readily obtained. The merchants had no alternative in the matter of accepting the army's paper money in payment for goods.

In the evenings there were the cantinas, not to mention the one brothel. In the old days this establishment had catered to the laborers of the mines which dotted all the countryside. It was a little house at the extreme edge of the town. Desiderio visited it one night with El Perico and found the experience a revolting one.

"Where did you pluck this good-looking youngster?" one of the women asked El Perico.

"Don't fall in love with him, he's a city chap," the latter warned her.

They sat about the little patio and drank warm beer, the taste of which Desiderio thought abominable. One of the women talked to him, asking about his past. She

laughed immoderately over his description of Arroyo and the models he brought to the studio to pose for him.

"A finished rascal, that," she observed. "But do you know what you should do? You should stop hanging about in such villages as this or Durango. You should go to the United States. Hai! The sights you see there! I have been in El Paso—they have a house in that city, the Mills Building, which reaches to the clouds, and they say that in other cities, in Tcheecago, there are towers beside which that one is no more than a hovel. There are automobiles until the roadways are no longer safe, and all the streets are paved. The lights at night! And every one wears beautiful clothes and is rich."

"I am going to see those places," Desiderio declared. "I am going to be an artist, and it is in places like that where there are schools in which it is possible to study and learn . . . and museums, too . . . and . . ."

"I suppose so, yes. And parks with wild animals in cages, I have heard. Life is never dull and you lack for nothing."

He thought: Why not? I shall not return to my home. I am not going to be a stagnant pool in Tepehuanes or in places like it. If Marta had not turned out to be the kind of person she is, it would have been different. The more I think of it, the more I see that I was to her the same as a new girl to Arroyo. And as long as I am surely determined to see a new place, why not in the United States?

Then he thought: But if I desert from the army, and take my horse, they will send after me and catch me. I cannot walk to Juárez. Besides, there are soldiers all through this country, and if they caught me they would hold me in prison or kill me. Perhaps I must wait till the revolution is over . . . but it is over, my father says.

"Why did you ever leave the United States and come to this place, if everything there is so wonderful?" he said aloud to the woman.

"Oh, that dog! I was in love with him, and he promised all kinds of things, but he brought me down here and deserted me. As soon as I get enough money I am going back. He even said he would marry me, the swine . . . well, what do you demand? I was in love with him. Ha! What do you know of love, a child like you?"

He glowered at her in sudden anger. He could tell her something, if he chose. What did she suppose he was doing in Tepehuanes? But when another group of soldiers came roistering in, and cracked broad jokes over finding him there, he left and returned to the barracks, rolling himself up in his blanket on the floor.

Buildings that touched the clouds, lights, throngs, art galleries, money . . . some day he would return to Durango as famous as Arroyo; would give lectures and receive fabulous prices for little portraits . . . Surely there was no reason to remain in the army. The holy cause El Perico used to talk about, that was all over and done with. He remembered, now. There was to be a convention in Querétaro. That would be where the new constitution would be written, with all the reforms in it . . . and meanwhile the whole, wide world was beckoning; calling him to see a new place. And that woman thought he did not know what love was! It was people like Marta or Arroyo who did not know what love was—real love. Yet perhaps they were right. Perhaps that was the way to navigate along with life until death should have come.

He felt an almost sullen resentment the next morning when he was dismissed with the others after drill. He remained silent through the breakfast that followed. Then

a messenger came to summon him to the headquarters of Mónico González at an inn which once had been a miners' boarding-house. He and Mónico were alone in the room, where the latter sat at a table.

"Take a chair, *paisanito*." Mónico motioned him to a seat, and began to shuffle through a litter of papers on the table. "I have just received a letter this morning from your father."

"I am not going back home, Don Mónico," the boy burst out passionately. "No one can make me go back."

"There is no cause for agitation. Drop your hackles, young game-cock," Mónico admonished him, smiling. "Your father is not only a good man, he is also a very wise one. Ah, here we are. He asks merely that in the event you should have joined my column, as he suspects, I be of whatever assistance I can to you. And so forth. And so forth. Wait a bit, now . . . here we are. This is the part I sought. Let me read it to you: 'Tell him I, too, served out my wander-years. I know what it is that drives him, for it drove me, too, in my time. May it drive him to better purpose, so that he will not come to the goal I reached, and wind up as a journeyman maker of dolls that work miracles. Tell him I do not want him to return until he himself wishes to come. Tell him his father embraces him, loves him—and envies him. And if you can do so, assist him in achieving his desire.' "

There was a big lump in Desiderio's throat, and he could not trust himself to speak. Mónico González must have sensed this, for he busied himself about his papers before he looked up.

"How old are you now, Lello?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

"Hmmm! Old enough to take care of yourself. I was

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no older than that myself when . . . but no matter. The point is: Was your father right? Is there something special you want to do?"

Desiderio nodded. The lump in his throat had risen again and troubled him for a moment.

"Well, then, out with it! Do you want to stay with us here? If things go on I will surely be able to get you a commission later; you have schooling . . . more than I had, certainly. So, would you wish to remain with us?"

"No, Don Mónico, with permission . . . it is not as I remembered it . . . as I thought it would be . . . I mean the way it used to be when . . ."

"That is all right, Lello. I understand. I can't say that I blame you. After all, you are not just one of those who, because he has a rifle and bandoliers well filled, thinks the only thing to do is to go on fighting. As a matter of fact, the whole thing probably isn't going on much longer. We might as well make up our minds to it. Carranza has won . . . or rather, Obregón has won it for him, and one of these days . . . but in any event, unless Carranza continues the old abuses or invents some new ones, there's nothing left to fight for. If he fulfills his pledges, Villa will not say two words or do two things. But that is all flour from another sack. If you do not want to stay with us, what is it you do want? Where would you like to go?"

"To the north."

"The north is a big place."

"To the United States, I mean. I want . . . I want to see a new place. I have been hearing all about it . . . I can study there—they have schools for artists."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph! You are an ambitious one! Do you know any one there?"

"No, but that does not matter. I am a man now. I did

not know any one in the army when I first left home, and I was no more than a child, then. But I got along."

"And what would you want me to do about it?"

"Don Mónico, if I could have my horse, that is all I want. I will keep going north to Juárez—I can find it without trouble, sticking to the hills . . ."

"You will need more than that, youngster. You will have to have some money, for one thing, and a safe-conduct of some sort, too. The entire Villa army is concentrating between here and Juárez. You'd be picked up every other day, if you had no safe-conduct. Well, I am certainly deep in your good father's debt, and he has asked me to help you. So you shall have what you need."

"Oh, Don Mónico!"

"That is all right. It is a relief to be doing something that gives some one pleasure. God knows there is grief enough for all. Which reminds me . . . we have a job on hand. We have found out who is the spy that has been giving away our dispositions. It is the old man who lives east of the city in that little cabin all by himself. Tell El Perico to take a squad out there and arrest him. This afternoon, if you will return here to my headquarters, I will have everything for you. And . . . for it is not good to go about the hills unarmed . . . a pistol and some ammunition too. And finally, then . . . you will not forget us, *paisanito*, when you are off God knows where?"

"Never, Don Mónico! Never!"

"I suppose you will want to leave at daybreak tomorrow?"

"If it is permitted."

"Permitted? Naturally. But do not forget the most important thing. Keep your canteen filled and filled and filled. Never pass by an opportunity to fill it. You can go quite a little while without food . . . I imagine you

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learned that during the famine in Durango . . . but you cannot go long without water. Go with God, little citizen. May you find what you seek!"

The rest of the day was a fever of all sorts of preparation. Choncha made ready at once to fill his saddlebags with food, and Toribio, though disconsolate, promised to steal eggs and aguardiente for a bottle of *rompope*.

"You leave just when we are getting all settled down to enjoy ourselves," he mourned. "I have even given up all idea of deserting, because here in Tepehuanes it is just like it was in my own village, except we make money, and are not searched when we come from the mines, or anything. And I tell you, *compadrito*, Choncha is going to have a baby soon, she has been long enough at it, considering the fact that she is my wife, isn't it true? But what I want to say, if you will forget this madness of leaving us, you shall be the baby's godfather. Even if there were triplets, and after all, why not?—you shall be godfather to all three of them. What do you say? . . . Ah, well! I suppose you know your own mind, and if the United States is indeed such a town as you describe it, what a wonderful place it must be!"

Desiderio went back, later that afternoon, to the brothel he had visited the previous night.

"Artists? To be sure, there is an artist in El Paso," the woman told him. "At least, he calls himself one—a pot-bellied *panzón* by the name of Garzo. He is a photographer with a place on South El Paso Street, near a big theater. There are many Mexicans thereabouts—you will have no difficulty. If you should need help, the house where I used to be is on Third Street; I have forgotten the number, but ask any one there for the place of Dolly. Tell them that La China sent you."

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He returned to the barracks later, his safe-conduct in his pocket along with a packet of banknotes, ready to face the world. He saw a commotion at the edge of the grove that bordered one side of the drill-ground. A crowd was ringed about a tree, absorbed in something the dense press of shoulders hid from view.

"What goes on?" Desiderio inquired of one of those on the outskirts.

"It is the spy, the one that lived in the *jacalito* east of the city. El Prieto ordered him executed. They found the papers, but he would not talk, so El Perico is making him talk. He is a marvel. No more than watch."

Desiderio wriggled his way through the press until he could see what was in progress. The spy had been strung up by the neck on a taut rope, so fastened that his feet just rested on the ground, where El Perico squatted—hatless, eyes shining and cheeks flushed, a heavy cavalry saber in his hand. Desiderio thought of the way El Perico had looked that evening in San Antonio del Mezquital, when, bound and helpless, El Tejocote had been delivered to the mother of Mónico González.

"Who sent you your money?" El Perico asked the standing prisoner.

The latter remained silent. El Perico passed his saber beneath the man's feet, scraping away a little—a very little—ground.

"Who sent you your money?"

Silence was followed by another saber-scrap. After a time so much ground had been thus gradually removed that the man, his head tilted far to one side, was barely able to support some of his weight on the extended tips of his toes.

"There is no hurry," El Perico assured him complacently. "You are no more than just a little uncomfortable now.

Later we will begin to scrape again, a little, little bit at a time. You will live a long while yet, if that is any comfort to you. Or you can end it now, if you like. All you have to do is to draw up your knees. When your windpipe is gradually being squeezed shut, you will wish you had done so. Who sent you your money? . . . What's that?"

He leaped to his feet to place his ear close to the man's moving lips. Then he cursed and spat on the straining figure.

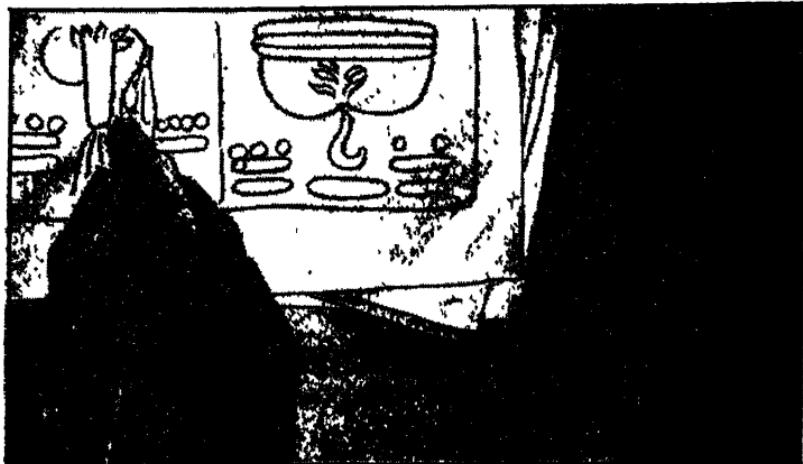
"Forgive *us*, for we know not what we do!" he exclaimed derisively. "Why, you son of a whore, you are the one that did not know what he was doing. Then good! Who sent you your money?"

He squatted at the man's feet once more and scraped lightly, almost delicately, beneath them with his saber.

"It will be amusing when you begin to kick and dance," he said, his head tilted upward. "That will come, never fear. And after that it will not be so very long until you cannot touch the ground with your toes, no matter how desperately you try. And think! The ground you will be struggling for will be only one hair's breadth beyond your reach. Who sent you your money?"

The man's breathing became stertorous, as he drew in convulsive gasps of air. Shuddering, Desiderio turned his face and shouldered his way back through the crowd. But the picture of the straining figure, slanting the least bit out of the perpendicular, with only the toes touching the ground, the head grotesquely canted to one side, would remain with him always.

When he mounted a slate-gray mare the next morning, before daybreak, and rode off to the north, he passed the stiffened corpse, still pendent, twisting and swaying in the dawn wind like a child's toy on a string.



UNDER A CERTAIN CURIOUS painting on a single sheet of very heavy parchment originally intended to line a saddle, there is a still more curious inscription. The whole constitutes a *retablo*, the pictorial record of an authentic miracle. It is to be seen to this day in a home-built shrine on a tiny farm, two days' ride north of Guanaceví in Durango, hard by the boundary-line between that state and Chihuahua.

The *retablo* stands in the single room of the hut of Prisciliano Molina, and is one of the few remaining traces of the Odyssey of Desiderio Triano. Others are the eyelashes of a St. John in one of the churches of Parral; a penciled sketch of the cell in which the priest Miguel Hidalgo was imprisoned in the city of Chihuahua; a bracelet hammered out of a silver teaspoon, originally a gift to a waitress in El Paso; an unrecognized but insanely ribald design of pseudo-Aztec cast, included among the murals of one of Chicago's most famous public dining-rooms; and finally—though this was after he had once more turned back toward the South—the entry “D. Trianon” on the

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blotter of the Fourth Precinct Police Station in New Orleans.

The inscription so painstakingly lettered beneath the *retablo* of Prisciliano Molina gives a graphic account of the events thereon depicted. It reads:

On the day twenty-two of the month of June of the year one thousand nine hundred and fifteen, Prisciliano Molina, working like every honorable man and good, God-fearing Christian, was driving his cart laden with ore from the mine La Estrella to the branch line of the railroad, when suddenly the mules which drew his cart were terrified by an animal assuredly sent by the Devil to put the faith of Prisciliano Molina to the test, and they gave a great bound, causing Prisciliano Molina to lose the equilibrium, falling beneath the left wheel of his cart laden with ore. He invoked his Holy Patron in that dire instant of hazard and peril, saying: "My Father the Nazarene, patron of all Durangians, aid me and hold my soul in your hands, Amen!" In that moment there appeared amid the branches of the huizache tree beside the stone fence, surrounded by shining light and clouds white as cotton, the image of the Redeemer bearing upon His shoulders His cross for the redemption of all sinners. And, without greater damage than that of a shoulder having fractured itself, Prisciliano Molina rose from beneath the left wheel of the cart laden with ore, and took note that the cart had been checked miraculously by a large stone which, without doubt, had been placed there by his Holy Patron. And in gratitude for this miracle granted to Prisciliano Molina, he dedicates this *retablo* to Our Father the Lord Nazarene of the Church of San Augustín in the city of Durango.

The large central painting immediately above the inscription faithfully depicts the miracle at the moment of its consummation. Prisciliano Molina is shown with arms upflung, tumbling from the seat of his cart laden with ore, and inevitably headed for a point beneath the left wheel. The stone fence and the huizache tree amid whose branches the vision appears are portrayed to a tittle. There are in addition four smaller sketches, one in each corner of the parchment sheet. At the upper left is a view of Prisciliano Molina and his cart just prior to the accident. At the upper right he is shown lying before the miraculously halted left wheel. At the lower left we see Prisciliano in the bed to which he was confined while the shoulder which fractured itself was in the process of mending. At the right he is shown kneeling gratefully before the candlelit altar of the Nazarene.

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*Of a truth, señor, it has always been my intention to send the retablo to the Church of San Augustin in Durango, but in all the years that have come and gone since a mischance brought that youth so gifted to my humble dwelling, there has not been even one traveler who passed here bound for Durango, so that there have been none by whom I could send it. Hence I constructed this shrine. As you see, my wife keeps an offering of bright flowers before it all the time, and on feast days there is a little wax candle, too.*

*I did not dream when I first beheld him that evening what good fortune was to be mine, for he was in great pain and could scarce walk. He dismounted, he informed me, to clamber down to a streamlet in a gully that he might fill the canteen. A stone turned under the foot and he twisted the ankle. There was little*

enough to offer him, for I am a poor man, but—the Lord Nazarene be praised for it!—there are always a few tortillas with frijoles, and my wife likewise made a poultice of boiled mullein leaves to draw the inflammation from the swollen ankle.

Being in some sense a fellow sufferer, I told him the tale of the accident that had befallen me two years earlier, together with the miracle that snatched me back from the shadow of the tomb on that occasion so memorable. I do not recall, señor, which one of us first mentioned a retablo in connection therewith, but indeed do I recall what took place the next day when we thought him quite mad, as, limping about impatiently, he made incomprehensible demands.

First I must bring him some almagre which, as the señor doubtless knows, is the red earth that is used in coloring our pottery. Then he asks me if there are any bright-hued stones about these hills. I tell him that I have quantities of them, picked up here and there during the years when I was a laborer in the mines, before the mishap so miraculous. He selects a blue one and a yellow one. Then nothing must do but my wife must give him at once the mortar in which she is grinding chiles for the meal. No, he will not wait, he begins to rage and scream, he must have the mortar at once.

Thinking the poor creature is out of his head, and that we shall pacify him, it is done as he wishes. Behold! He grinds into powder at the cost of great exertion first the blue stone, then the yellow stone. Not merely into small particles, you must believe, but into the finest powder. Then my wife must bring him the clay cooking-tiles from the fireplace. Will he

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*grind up the tiles next? But no, he merely scrapes from beneath them the thick black soot.*

*Now he is calm. But indeed, señor, he is not yet through. I must bring him two feathers from the wing of a turkey or the tail of a cock. It is done. With the pen-knife he clips off the ends of the quills so that they are like little tubes, large at one end, small at the other. And then once more is he screaming at me, and demanding why I have not brought him our cat. I am frightened, señor, I assure you, but what is to be done? The poor little crazed one may wreak mischief if I do not comply with his orders. Nothing will serve, therefore, but I must catch our tomcat, which is no child's play, for he is a godless beast, and it is neither more nor less than another miracle that I do not carry to the grave the scars of the scratches he dealt me when at last I hemmed him in and clasped him to me.*

*Mark me well, now, and may the Child of Atocha cease to aid me if I lie! From above the spine of the protesting tomcat he cuts two tufts of hair. About one end of each of them he ties a thread he has pulled from the fabric of the shirt. He thrusts one tuft into each of the quills, so that the part that is tied is caught tightly, tightly by the narrow end of the tube, and the free tips of hair project. Into the large end of each quill he fits a wooden handle that he whittles. No more than look! Have I lied? Here are those two very brushes, which I have carefully preserved.*

*But he is screaming again. Why have I not brought him a jarrito of clear water? Where is the thick sheet of parchment he saw me scraping the evening before, when I told him I was preparing the lining for a new*

*saddle? I bring him these matters too, and then, indeed, in the shade of this very tamarind tree, he begins his labors.*

*When I behold the skill, I stand transfixed. It is like nothing I have ever before even dreamed. Once he asks me how many wheels had the cart and how many mules were hitched to it. I stand at his shoulder, I cannot lift my eyes from such beauty as he paints upon the parchment with his brushes and the colors he makes by mixing the powders with water. Surely the Nazarene himself is guiding the hand! My wife comes to see what goes on. Señor, she too is spell-bound and cannot leave. My fourteen-year-old daughter comes, but her I command to return, and I address her in no uncertain tones, for frankly, I have been filled with misgivings by the glances this youth has been casting at her.*

*Behold it once more! Beyond question you have traveled far, you have seen many fine cities and great churches. But tell me in honor of truth, señor, have you ever in any of your journeys beheld a finer retablo? Often I think of the youth so talented of whom I have heard nothing since the day he left us after completing this masterpiece. My wife roasted a chicken and put it into his saddlebags and filled them with tacos when, having regained the full use of the ankle, he rode off. For indeed we were grateful to him, though I confess I had relief when he left. I did not at all like the look in his eye when he regarded my daughter.*

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Desiderio halted his pilgrimage briefly in Parral. This is vouched for by a grave and kindly priest, the padre Epifanio de Lara, to whose church the young man came,

after putting up his horse at a *mesón* in the outskirts of the city. Father de Lara made him very welcome when he introduced himself as the son of Don Jaime Triano.

"Of course I have heard of that noted sculptor of saints," he beamed. "Have we not right in my church a San Juan of his carving? Come, I will show you."

"I do not remember that one," said Desiderio, after he made his genuflection and examined the life-size figure.

"That is small matter for wonder, my son, since it has stood there for more years than you possess."

"The eyelashes are gone, Father. I can still see where they used to be."

"Ah, yes, it is true, the moths and the flies ate them as the years went on, and with times what they are, it would be too expensive to . . . ."

"I should be happy to replace them. After all, it is the work of my father."

"He taught you his craft? You could do it?"

"Assuredly. If you will recommend me to one of your parishioners who has a black cow, your San Juan shall have eyelashes this very afternoon."

From the fetlock of a black cow Desiderio cut the hairs whose length, taper and curl make them exactly right to serve as lashes for a life-size figure. While furniture glue to which a clove of crushed garlic and a bit of brown sugar had been added stewed in a small pot over an open fire, he trimmed a doubled scrap of thin paper to fit the curve of the upper eyelid of San Juan. Picking up the hairs one at a time on the moistened point of a needle-sharp sliver of wood, he glued them in a well-spaced row, curving outward and upward. When this had dried, the paper fold that now clipped the hairs fast was trimmed to fit the edge of

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the wooden eyelid of San Juan and was there glued into place.

Desiderio refused to accept pay for this work, but finally took the scapular that Father de Lara pressed upon him. That night and the next he also passed in Parral, though Father de Lara knew nothing of it, having little contact with the haunts Desiderio visited.

At daybreak, the following morning, he continued his pilgrimage, making for Chihuahua City, a journey of many days. This was his first metropolitan experience. However, the street-cars and other outward signs of urban opulence failed to claim his attention upon his arrival. On the contrary, he made at once for the magnificent public building which has been constructed around the dark and dingy cell where the *cura* Miguel Hidalgo was confined during the days preceding his execution. He made a pencil sketch of the cubicle, peopling it with ghostly royalist soldiers in the uniform of his Most Catholic Majesty, Fernando VII.

Later in the day he gave this sketch to the officer to whom he presented his safe-conduct, having small fancy for being picked up by some overzealous military guard as a deserter, in a city that literally swarmed with soldiers at the time. In return, the officer made place for him on a military train that was to leave at dawn the next morning for Juárez, thus saving him many weary days of travel.

There is official record of him at Juárez, for he received a passport to visit the United States of the North. These records will show that he lied scandalously about his age, and that he informed the authorities he was by occupation a student. Apart from officially recorded data, it is no less a fact that he purchased a new outfit of clothing to replace the disintegrating garments in which he had left Tepehuanes. The merchant from whom these purchases were

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made swindled him grievously. In the guise of offering disinterested advice he warned Desiderio to supply himself with American currency before crossing the border. Then, generously bent upon sparing his young patron needless inconvenience, he gave him a few American coins for what was left of his packet of banknotes.

Desiderio's first disappointment, on entering the land of the free, was to find that the street-car conductors were Americans. He thought: I imagined all Americans were engineers or physicians or attorneys, and yet some of them seem to be common laborers. Surely, then, they cannot all be rich . . . but how will I ever be able to tell the difference between them? The faces all look alike. The words all sound alike. In one place people laughed, in another they shouted and were angry, and in another they seemed engaged upon important affairs; yet in each instance the words sounded exactly alike. However, the buildings are most assuredly as tall as La China said. Evidently she was telling the truth.

So he strolled toward the district of tall buildings, but suddenly found himself surrounded on all hands by Americans. A swift access of shyness sent him back to the friendly reaches of South El Paso Street, where one could see Mexicans, and could, if the need arose, receive an intelligible answer to an inquiry. Before night he had found the photographer who called himself *el artista* Garzo in a mean little gallery dedicated primarily to passport photographs and the development of kodak prints for amateurs. Given proof of the applicant's ability, Garzo readily struck a bargain by which Desiderio was engaged as assistant artist.

"We can now retouch photographs and do fine work,"

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Garzo assured him. "The business will grow and, who knows? Some day there may be a partnership."

Desiderio slept on a pallet he spread nightly in one of the rear rooms of the studio quarters. He took his meals, such as they were, in a hole-in-the-wall across the street. For Serafina, the waitress there, he later made out of a silver teaspoon she stole a bracelet in which was set a Turk's head carved from an onyx-like pebble picked up on a hill-side during a Sunday afternoon walk. As to the motives which prompted the gift, one conjecture is as good as another.

He felt no pang of homesickness, but now and again he thought of Marta. At first this would bring a surge of desire to return to Durango, to seek her out, and put into bitter words the scorn he felt toward her. She had evoked a tenderness and a desire no one else had ever aroused in him, and she had betrayed it all. She was no better than the women of the brothels, and belonged with them. If only she had not laughed, that night at the *serenata*, he might have forgiven her anything, for the thought of her embrace invariably called into being the cloying sense of sweetness which had once suffused him with such ineffable delight.

Sometimes he imagined what it would be like to steal back by night, unknown to any one, to come upon her and kill her. As the weeks went by, his black fury mounted with his loneliness, for in truth he made no friends in El Paso. The more he thought of her, the more convinced he became that she had light-heartedly desecrated something that to him had been holy and sacred.

In other respects, too, he was not satisfied with his situation in El Paso, once he had learned enough of the alien tongue in which North Americans couched their thoughts.

He considered: I am not really seeing a new place here, living as I do with and among Mexicans. This Garzo is a pork-head who has not even the equipment to take good photographs. I therefore learn nothing; not even enough English. I think I will go to Tcheecago. There is an art school in that city, and if I am ever to learn anything, I had better begin. In any case, I will be seeing a new place.

He turned his hand to many a mean occupation in Chicago to keep body and soul together, and he suffered cruelly from the unaccustomed rigors of that first winter. But a year later his "Adolorida" was accepted for exhibition by the American Society, a carved granite figurine which one critic characterized as "a Niobe of the Middle Americas." There is a great bronze portal in the Loop that was cast from his models in clay. A certain librarian treasures a pair of weighted book-ends, copied from one of the sketches Desiderio had once seen in Arroyo's portfolios, a detail from a frieze in the wall of the Pyramid of the Dwarf in the ruins of a Maya palace group. The figures are those of two very tipsy yet very dignified owls.

Finally, there are a few initiates who know that, tucked away and all unnoted among the garish murals of the Aztec dining-room in an internationally famous hotel, an insanely ribald glyph purports to give the symbol a vanished race of scribes might have used to designate the word-sound Tcheecago. The artist who had been commissioned to decorate this dining-room asked Desiderio at a studio revel in a Huron Street apartment whether any picture-writing sign with which he was familiar might answer the purpose he had in mind. This was some months prior to the day when the manufacture, sale, transportation and possession of intoxicants temporarily became a felony in the United States of America. Desiderio had partaken freely of such

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refreshments as were available. Under the mischievous spur of this cargo, he devised on the spot a bi-partite glyph so highly conventionalized that the unschooled—or perhaps “unwarned” would be better—eye of innocence would fail to see in the design anything that might not grace the parlor what-not of a New England spinster. The glyph is one frequently repeated in the decorative theme that thus confers a presumptively Aztec atmosphere upon one of the world’s famous dining places.

Hardly ever did he now think of Marta Tovar. Yet when he did, he found that time had not softened the bitterness he still harbored toward her, and once he asked himself curiously why he should cherish so deep a resentment.

He thought: I have known many women, now, and among them a number who were far worse than Marta in their treatment of me. And I have treated some of them pretty badly myself. Yet I feel no hatred toward any of the others, whereas if I should see Marta tomorrow, I should want to make her suffer all the anguish I could inflict. Maybe that is because I was not taken in by the others, but knew them for what they were, or what they might be. . . . She may be married to some stupid clod by this time. I hope so. I should like to think she had fooled some one else too. Perhaps if I saw her then it would mean nothing to me, who knows?

By the close of a second year, however, it appeared that the possibilities of Tcheecago had also been well drained. Desiderio thought: I will make a mistake if I return to the Institute. What I can get from instruction I now possess. Should I stay longer they will cast me into one mold with who knows how many others, and I will sit in some little studio waiting for commissions from architects. Thus I will have to be doing work to please others—a thing against

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which my father so emphatically cautioned me. What difference is there between carving wooden saints and modeling Greek capitals for a modern bank? It is now time for me to see what I can produce on my own account. Besides, Janet is making a damned nuisance of herself with her eternal jealousies . . . and it is long since I have seen a new place. I think I shall not go to New York, for they say that is merely a larger Tcheecago. Moreover, in the South I should escape another of these ghastly winters. If only I had a horse, I could ride down the valley of the Mississippi and see many new places till I found one that suited me. However, they say I may be able to secure passage on a river steamer from St. Louis to the Gulf.

Thus Desiderio became a marble-cutter in the monument yard of Alcide Duplessin, near one of the cemeteries along Esplanade Avenue, in New Orleans. Later still, he was employed as a wood-carver by a cabinetmaker on Chartres Street, almost in the shadow of the old Cabildo.

At the opening exhibit of the Arts and Crafts Club a plaster cast of "El Ahorcado" became the focus of public interest. The figure was that of a man supported on the very tips of his toes, the body tilted the least bit out of the perpendicular, the head canted grotesquely to one side, so that the victim seemed to hang suspended. On one shoulder, balancing with half-spread wings, a vulture perched.

The words "macabre" and "gruesome" were added to Desiderio's vocabulary when he read the newspaper clippings. But he had also been reading in the newspapers that Carranza was seeking to perpetuate himself in power, that the revolution was to be continued by what was known as the Sonora Triumvirate, and during a wild and whirling night in the Tango Belt beyond Rampart Street, he assaulted

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a Spanish importer who insisted that Mexico's sole hope for a return to orderly government lay in a restoration of the old régime under which Díaz had kept the country pacified for more than thirty years.

He was arrested as D. Trianon; at least, that is how the name appears on the police records. No trial followed, however, because the importer refused to testify. None the less, Desiderio disappeared from New Orleans, having first reduced the plaster of "El Ahorcado" to unrecognizable shards with a mallet. Thereafter no trace of him is anywhere recorded until he turns up once more in El Paso, where it may be ascertained that, for a brief space, he was again employed by the artist, Garzo.



WORKING OR IDLING, DAY OR night, Desiderio thrilled exultantly to the realization that he could now return to Mexico whenever he chose. The old, vague restlessness that had driven him forth in quest of the unknown was superseded by a new sense of power. Occasionally he dropped whatever he was doing at the moment, and hastened to a point along the river from which he could look across to the distant hill of Fuerte Hidalgo. There he would picture the rising tiers of the Sierra Madre; he would salute the invisible peaks with a gay wave of the hand. In that direction, somewhere beyond the horizon, there must be a valley in which water and clay and wood and stone were ready to hand. There, withdrawn from the world, he would give free rein to the dominance over form and design that had come to him one night between clock ticks.

He had been working with Filomena when it happened. One instant he was nagging at the clay, fretting it, petulant with frustration because what he strove for remained beyond unseen barriers. The next instant it was as if he had crossed a threshold and were in a new place. His vision

was no keener, his touch no surer; yet he knew at once that his quest had come to a successful end. He wanted to pick up the clay in caressing, cupped hands. He wanted to fondle it, warming it as he molded it to his will.

At first he was afraid this would all prove transitory. He worked in feverish haste to accomplish what he might while it endured. Then came the conviction that there would be no waning, that he had found himself. Thereafter he was no longer jealous of the minutes. Time did not matter. He had at his disposal all the remaining years of his life. Whether he began next week or next month or next year was now of secondary importance, because the decision rested solely with himself. It was not a question that hinged upon the caprice of some uncomprehended force beyond his control.

He felt this when he bent over the stained and scarred retouching table in Garzo's studio; during his walks with Arcadio along the San Jacinto plaza; while he sat before the greasy counters where he absently consumed dreadful stews of stringy meat afloat in a sea of pepper-laden fat.

His mind was engrossed with it now as, hunched over a drawing-board in the back room of the bookstore of Rómulo Pereira, he put finishing touches to a caricature for *La Patria*. A chuckle escaped him, and Arcadio Navarro, viewing the progress of the sketch over Desiderio's shoulder and believing this to be the source of the artist's amusement, appreciatively echoed his laughter.

What a thorn in the eye of the *carranzistas* this would be! How it would make them cast thunders and lightnings! Perhaps it would even fall under the dictatorial gaze of Don Venus himself. So much the better. For, lest any one mistake the intent of the long beard and eyeglasses of the fleeing mongrel in the cartoon, the letters "CARRANZA"

appeared on the creature's collar, while the cat which pursued him not only lacked the right foreleg and had a mustache, but was baldly labeled "OBREGÓN."

Desiderio dabbed at the drawing once or twice with an eraser and then passed it to Arcadio.

"Here you are," he said. "Signed, sealed and delivered. Now I must be on my way. I have much to do tonight."

"Look here, Triano, when are you going to let me see some of your real work?"

"What work?"

"What do I know? But I am no fool. I have a pair of eyes even if I do have to assist them with these spectacles. You do not for a moment suppose, do you, that I conceive of some one like you satisfying himself with retouching a few photographs now and then for a pig like Garzo? Why are you so secretive about your work?"

Desiderio shrugged his shoulders.

"You flatter, my friend. Just because I made some sketches of you and your father, you seem to be imagining a lot of nonsense."

"Now good, if that is what you want to maintain. But just bear in mind that I do not believe you. When will we see one another again?"

"Tomorrow night, if you like."

"Splendid. We can go to the movies, perhaps. Until then."

"Until tomorrow!"

They left the back room, passed through the store, and separated when they reached the open. Desiderio turned west past the big department stores to the corner of Santa Fé and San Francisco Streets, where he waited beneath the arclight. He thought: If I let even him know what I am doing, others will find out, and then it will be the same

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thing as New Orleans. I shall continue to work in secret. If it were not for completing this one figure I might go to Mexico this very night.

A woman who wore a *rebozo* and a long, voluminous skirt, shuffled toward the corner where he waited.

"You are late, Filomena."

"There was no help for it. My husband needed an extra order of tamales to be delivered for a private party, in addition to those he sells from his handcart. I have no more than finished. I came as fast as I could."

"Good. Let us not delay."

Together they walked toward the lights of one of the cheaper, second-run motion-picture theaters. Entering the alley which bordered one side of this long and narrow structure, they passed through a littered courtyard and up a dingy flight of stairs. Desiderio unlocked the door, and Filomena followed him into the room. A light clicked on. Without instructions, Filomena mounted a model stand, adjusted her position from what seemed to be long practice, and became immobile. Desiderio unmasked a four-foot clay figure and began to work.

He thought: She has in her face a quality of eternity that I will transmit to the stone when I finally come to carve the finished statue. It cannot be done with clay, for there shall be nothing soft about my *soldadera* . . . Why am I so glad that no one else knows about this? When I leave for Mexico, I will destroy it. This is a good design, though. I must give her a child; a child that clings to her while she supports it with one arm . . . but that can wait until I reach my valley, wherever it is. I will bring a girl there, and a sack of seed-corn. Then I will have everything I need. . . . Arcadio Navarro is perhaps not such a bad sort, but he thinks because he has seen a copy of Gauguin's "Noa-

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Noa" he has learned all about art . . . If this revolution becomes serious, it may be I will rejoin the army. Then, if I get killed, that would be a good joke on me, just when I have found out what I want to do and how to do it. But that is all right. What was it my father used to say? "Mexico matters, but the individual Mexican does not." I think, though, there will be little fighting in this revolution now. The newspapers say Carranza is already on the point of fleeing from Mexico City to Veracruz.

Aloud he said:

"Sit down and rest for a few minutes, Filomena."

It was an odd chance that had thrown him into association with Arcadio Navarro, whose father, Don Próspero, was one of the leading spirits of a group that foregathered almost nightly in a little printing-shop on South Oregon Street. Here *La Patria*, an anti-Carranza weekly, was published, backing the cause of the newly formed Sonora Triumvirate: Obregón, Calles and de la Huerta.

Arcadio was a serious youth, whose thick-lensed spectacles gave his eyes a curiously threatening distortion, oddly at variance with his otherwise chubby aspect. He and Desiderio first met in one of the small art supply stores, whither the latter had gone to purchase a few sticks of charcoal and a lump of kneaded eraser. He heard Arcadio ask for a Van Gogh print, and they drifted into conversation. Educated in Paris, young Navarro now devoted himself to the writing of verse. His father, an aristocrat of the old régime, had fled Mexico at the time of the overthrow of Díaz, and settled in El Paso to resume the practice of law. It did not occur to Desiderio to wonder why a reactionary should culminate so actively on behalf of Obregón. He had seen too many federals desert their standard in the old days, and so

took it for granted that this was but another instance of the same sort.

Through Arcadio he met, at various times, other members of the little junta which backed *La Patria*. There was portly Rómulo Pereira, proprietor of the bookshop, leader among various Catholic fraternal bodies and once received at an audience in the Vatican—an occasion he never wearied of describing. He was avidly addicted to the writings of the classic philosophers, and frequently discoursed at incredible length upon the Middle Academy of Xenocrates, and its derivation from the preceptorship of Plato. Since Desiderio did much of his work for *La Patria* in the Pereira bookshop, he heard much of this, and concluded that Plato must be a comforting sort of tutor, for either side of any argument could readily be proved by such statements as: "Being without envy or malice, God conceived a perfect world. In the imitation of God, therefore, man strives for that perfection which is to be attained through a knowledge of truth."

Another of the sponsors of *La Patria*—its editor, in fact—was Alfredo Sánchez, who owned and operated the print-shop where the weekly was published, though his mind rarely seemed to be on the practical details this involved. A series of fiery editorials on the political situation in Mexico, a call to all patriots to rally against the oppression of Carranza, a fulsome eulogy of some anti-administration leader on either side of the international boundary—these were the principal features of each issue, and in their preparation Don Alfredo took a lively enough interest. But the balance of the reading matter consisted of "society" notes, and to make the task of preparing them more palatable, the editor tricked out these commonplaces of family life among the members of the Mexican colony of El Paso in sonorous and grandiose

phraseology. Thus the birth of a child, the first communion of a daughter, a box party at a motion-picture theater, the award of a garden prize, an at-home-plus-piano-recital—such chronicles as these rubbed typographical elbows with vitriolic diatribes on the presidential aspirations of Ignacio Bonillas, put forward by Carranza as administration candidate on the plea that the election of General Obregón would subject the nation to militarism.

There were others who figured in this loosely knit association, but Desiderio did not meet them. So nearly complete was the isolation in which he maintained himself that he rarely even bothered to look at the printed copies of *La Patria* which Arcadio showed him. A glance at the drawing for the week, to see what sort of reproduction had been accorded it, and the four-page journal was cast aside.

It had all begun with a gift to Arcadio, when the latter invited him to his home, where Desiderio made a pencil sketch of the young poet in studious attitude, by way of a return courtesy. The sketch was reproduced in *La Patria*, together with a poem of flaming propaganda: *Despierta*. It was greatly admired, and later Desiderio made sketches of Don Próspero, Alfredo Sánchez and others.

From this it had been but a step toward the contribution, at Arcadio's request, of a weekly cartoon to the cause, though Desiderio never accepted any of the invitations to attend a meeting of the little junta. It flattered him to be taken seriously by these men of undoubted standing and importance, but he would not permit this to effect any breach in his determination to live a life apart.

A few days each week he worked in the studio of *el artista* Garzo, earning enough thereby to cover his most immediate and pressing needs and to lay aside an ever mounting fund wherewith to finance the forthcoming search

for his valley. For the rest, he passed his waking hours in the dingy little den off an alley back of a second-run movie theater, working on the two models he intended to complete before his departure: an elaboration of "El Ahorcado"; and "La Soldadera," which should symbolize the rôle played by army women in the liberation of Mexico.

Sometimes the new surge of power, the grasp of what he was driving for, intoxicated him. He pictured a ninety-foot *soldadera*, cut from cunningly joined blocks of limestone, dominating the surrounding sierra from the naked spine of a long ridge.

He thought: I shall finish these two models here in El Paso. Then I shall destroy them and find my valley. First I will go to Durango, to tell my father what I plan to do. He will understand and will say it is the right thing. Then I will wander off until I find a place that is to my liking. Somewhere along the journey I will make a halt at a smithy and forge whatever tools I need. I shall thus work after my own fashion . . . for five years . . . or ten . . . or forever. What does it matter? I have all the rest of my life in which to work. There will always be corn and beans and some one to share them with me. Should I feel the need for a change, I will go see a new place; but I will always return and resume my work.

Then he thought: But why am I planning this? I no longer care what any one else thinks about my work. I used to care, and I used to dream of being like Arroyo and having all the world come to me in admiration. But I certainly do not want that sort of thing any more. And I am just as certainly not actuated by any desire to beautify the world, to enrich it with treasures before I pass on. After I am dead, it will make no difference to me whether even one single soul remembers the name of Desiderio Triano de [ 304 ]

Parra. Why, then, am I doing this thing? . . . I do not know. But I am going to do it, anyway.

He hurried from his retreat one afternoon to snatch a few bites of food, realizing abruptly that in the absorption of his labors he had forgotten some meals. Filomena, who often brought him a few tamales or some crisply fried *tacos* when she came to pose, had not appeared at the studio the night before. When he mingled with the pedestrians on the street, he became conscious of a subdued sort of holiday atmosphere. The boom of cannon fire and the pealing of bells was borne across the Rio Grande from Juárez. Then he remembered. This was the Fifth of May, annually celebrated as the anniversary of the victory of Puebla in the time of Maximilian. There would be a big *fiesta* in Juárez that night; a military concert in the plaza and fireworks from the roof of the Church of Guadalupe. For one instant he was tempted to cross the International Bridge forthwith, to steep himself in the glow of nationalism that night, and set off for the South at once.

Then he recalled that he must first go to Garzo's studio to claim the money there accumulated, enough for a ticket to Chihuahua City, a horse, a pistol and ammunition. He recalled, too, that "La Soldadera" was not yet finished. Besides, both she and "El Ahorcado" must be destroyed before he began the quest for the valley where they would be given final form in stone.

He thought: I must not forget that there is no longer any need for haste. I have years and years at my disposal now. There will be other *fiestas*. This is only May. When the Fifteenth of September is celebrated, I will be in a new place.

He turned to seek out one of the shabby restaurants he patronized for economy's sake, and checked in mid-stride.

For an instant, confusion gripped him, as though he had been dazzled by some unexpected and intense flash which none the less shed no brightness.

The woman's figure was not an arresting one, nor was there any haunting sense of familiarity. Yet he was suddenly palpitant with desire to see her, and crossed the street without stopping to think. He hurried almost at a run along the opposite sidewalk until he had passed her, crossing back that he might come upon her face to face.

Then he had stepped into a doorway, his back to the street and his knees weak, feeling that within him a bubble of fear had expanded and burst, sending its chill to every recess of his being. The girl was Marta Tovar.

Trembling, as in the clutch of an ague, he followed her to a house on Third Street, saw her enter, scribbled the address in his notebook subconsciously, and then realized what district this was and what manner of doorway had received her.

Blindly, as he had once struck off into the *mezquital*, he now plunged into the wilderness of streets and traffic, neither knowing nor caring whither his feet might lead him. He had been right, then, so long ago, when a sense of boyish outrage had driven him to leave his home and wander about the world to seek escape from himself.

But perhaps it was he who had brought her to this, by the bitterness of his feeling toward her, by the oft-expressed thought of what she must be. Fiercely he told himself that this was not true. She had been then no more than she was now. She had given herself to lovers lightly, as lightly as Arroyo went from one affair to the next. She had brought him to a new place, indeed, but only for her own amusement and gratification. The sole difference was that whereas she had given herself then, she sold herself now. She had

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been, as she now was, a . . . but he could not bring himself to utter the word even in his thoughts.

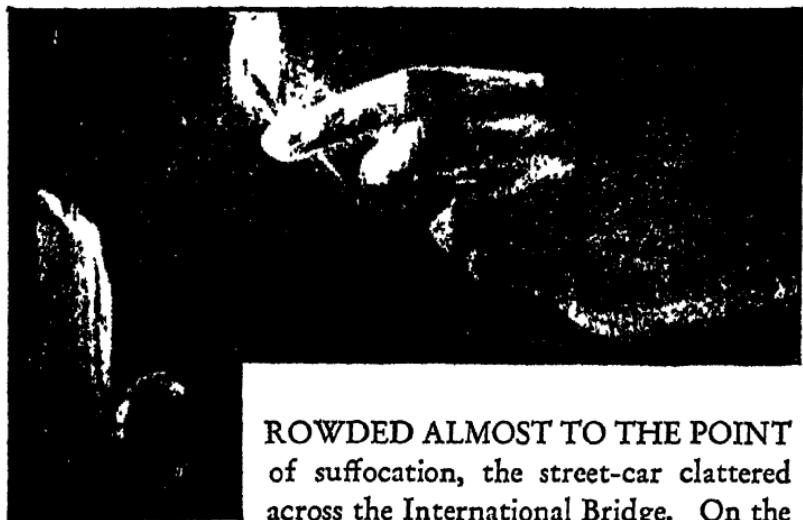
He drove on through the evening and tried to force the chaos of his mind into some semblance of order. As on other occasions, he toyed with the idea of seeking her out to kill her; picturing to himself her blank surprise when she first saw him, the dawn of recognition, her terror as his purpose became plain. Now and again he paused in puzzled wonder to ask himself why he should feel as he did, why the old sense of betrayal, of desecration, should have returned with such overwhelming pain.

He thought: Surely I must have loved her. She was to me everything that I sought without knowing what I desired. And when I found out how much less than nothing all that meant to her, how she played with me for her own amusement, perhaps merely for her own vanity . . . but I made up my mind to forget all of that, and I did forget. I have known many other women, and I have loved some of them, I suppose . . . but it is all back. It is as if I were still in Durango, watching the *serenata* that Sunday night.

He found himself at the river bank, at the well-remembered point from which he could look across toward the distant hill of Fuerte Hidalgo. The ceremonial roll of drums was faintly audible through the gathering twilight.

Suddenly he thought: This is really providential. It makes a decision for me that it may be I have been postponing too long. If I go now to get my money from Garzo, I will have time to return to my room and there do that which is necessary. Then, when I have had a bite to eat, I will start. Within two hours I can be on my way to my valley.





ROWDED ALMOST TO THE POINT of suffocation, the street-car clattered across the International Bridge. On the American side a bored civilian official and a stockily built soldier with the brassard of an M.P. wedged their way perfunctorily from one end of the car to the other. On the Mexican side the halt was a trifle longer. A customs officer, struck by the shapelessness of a young woman's silk-clad legs, made an examination which showed that she was wearing six pairs of stockings.

"They are all mine," the woman shrilled in protest. "Is there a law which says I cannot wear as many stockings as I please? I always wear several pairs of stockings."

"Now, now," the official said cheerfully. "You'll have to come with us. Look there, you could not even lace up your shoe."

A stout matron immediately behind Desiderio voiced her disapproval in an undertone addressed to those about her.

"If she had on six pairs of gloves, or if a man had on six pairs of trousers, he would never have noticed it," she observed.

Desiderio alighted at the Avenida Lerdo and immediately lost himself in the crowd that had flocked to Juárez for the evening's merrymaking. He suppressed an impulse to shout

aloud in the joy of finding himself not only in Mexico once more, but embarked at last upon his great adventure, and if the thought of Marta sought to intrude upon him, he beat it sternly back. In the confusion that seethed on all sides, it is probable that a vocal jubilation on his part would have attracted little attention.

Soldiers and civilians, rich and poor, Mexicans and foreigners, frock coat and *charro* buckskin, shifted kaleidoscopically in the great mass of humanity that filled the thoroughfares. Here were half a dozen cowboys from the United States, wearing gaudy, brass-studded girdles and ornate, high-heeled boots. There a group of officers and silk-clad ladies strolled toward the plaza where the military concert was in progress. A huddle of rural tourists from the far north gaped at the sights about them, unconscious of being themselves the objects of just as frank a curiosity on the part of a number of Mexicans who, despite the warmth of the evening, wore thick woolen *zarapes* thrown back over one shoulder.

Desiderio stepped into the thronged bar of the Tivoli for a glass of beer, and his ears were assailed by a clamorous medley of the click of chips, the rattle of dice in the chuck-a-luck cages, the cries of gamblers and the confused surf of many voices raised in conversation. He went back into the night, drifting with the slow current of the crowd toward the plaza, but turned off at the confluence of Commerce Street with the Street of the Devil, a thoroughfare whose true name—that of a hero of the Independence—has been all but forgotten. From the dance-hall brothels came the tinny cacophony of music. Before each doorway a group of silent men watched stolidly the revels of those who had money to riot away.

At the second street intersection he turned to the left,  
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heading for the old Church of Guadalupe. He wanted to listen to the music, watch the fireworks, sense the spirit of the assemblage. After half an hour or so of this he would go to the railroad station to wait until a train should leave for the South. Perhaps he would travel all the way to Durango by rail. The sooner he spoke to his father, the better. They would all be happy to see him, and his mother would protest volubly when she found out he would leave almost at once. Then, too, there was his baby nephew, Xochitl's little son, whom he had never seen, and who must now be at least a year old. He liked to think of Xochitl and her baby. Some day, perhaps . . .

At the sharp command of an officer, a squad of eight soldiers halted within a few yards of him.

"Open a way there!" he heard the officer order gruffly.

He stepped aside to comply.

"Not you," said the officer. "It is you we have come for."

Then he noticed that the soldiers had aligned themselves so that four of them stood in single file on each side of him.

"March! Move off!"

With the crowd opening a path, they went to the *cuartel*, only a block distant. He was brought at once before the officer of the day, beside whom stood a civilian.

"Is this the one?" asked the officer of the day.

"The very one," assented the civilian.

"Put him in a cell till a court-martial can be convened. The officers are all at the plaza. Sergeant, notify them we are ready. They can all be here within a few minutes."

Desiderio tried to make himself heard.

"Never mind," he was told. "You can tell it all at the court-martial later."

He had not long to wait in the dark cell that was but little wider than the heavy door by which it was entered.

In fact, he had not yet recovered from the stupefaction into which he had been thrown by the shock of his arrest when he was summoned into a room whose bright lights hurt his eyes, adjusted as these were to the blackness of his cell. After a time he saw the three officers seated at a table, a scribe at one side, guards at the door.

He was startled to find that he had been leaning forward, gripping the back of a chair tightly with his hands. He had thought he was standing very straight, soldierly, for he planned to impress upon the officers that he, too, was a soldier of the revolution. He thought that if some one would only bring Mónico González, so that he could appear at the trial, it would be easy to explain the mistake that was being made. Or even Toribio. If Toribio were there, he would not let any one do anything to hurt him. Then he remembered that Mónico and Toribio had been with the defeated Villa army, and that these were Carranza's soldiers who had arrested him.

Vaguely he caught the words: ". . . sedition against the constitutional government, espionage . . ." and realized with a shock that these charges referred to himself. He thought he had been listening very attentively; but this made him aware of the fact that he had no idea of what had been said. He began to speak, but he was so bewildered that his fuddled tongue could not keep pace with his racing ideas, and he was abruptly told to hold his peace.

Later some copies of *La Patria* were called to his attention. They seemed to have been materialized out of the nowhere.

"Did you draw this? And this? And this? Come, speak up, we haven't got the whole night!"

"Yes, I drew them. Of course. But a friend of mine

asked me to draw them for him. I tell you, I had not the least idea that . . .”

“Enough. A likely story! Enter on the record the fact that the accused confesses. All right, Colonel Benato. You represent the prisoner. But hurry up. You do not have to say much, the scribe will note in the record that he was duly defended.”

Numbness closed down over Desiderio once more. He caught a few disjointed sentences about extreme youth, ignorance of the gravity of the offense, and things of that sort, but they were quite meaningless. To his amazement, he found himself again leaning forward, eyes closed, tightly gripping the back of a chair.

“Isn’t the sentence written out yet?” one of the older officers asked impatiently. “Then give me the paper. I will sign it now. You too, Captain. Then the clerk can finish writing it after we have left, and you, Lieutenant—you have to stay here, anyway—you read it to him, and put him back in his cell.”

The young lieutenant frowned while the clerk completed his task, the steel pen rasping noisily over the paper in the sudden stillness that fell upon the room. When he finally read the document to Desiderio, he mumbled through its official phrases in a hurried monotone. He did not even give emphasis to the words: “to be shot within the term of twelve hours.”

“Take him back to the same cell,” he directed the guards.

When he heard behind him the clank of the heavy latch and the creak and snick of the great padlock that secured it, Desiderio began to understand his situation, though the whole affair still seemed to be badly blurred. As matters stood, he would not even see the sun rise tomorrow. He recalled hearing something about “five o’clock . . . no later

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. . . don't want to march him through the streets when there are a lot of people around . . . start half an hour before daybreak and you'll get to the cemetery by the time there is light enough."

Frantically he began to pace back and forth along the length of his cell, from the door which almost completely occupied the width of the inner wall to the long, barred window in the outer one. If only he could manage to straighten out his thoughts, so that he might know where to begin. Somehow there must be something that he could do or say to convince them. This cell, now . . . perhaps there might be some way . . .

He struck a match with trembling fingers. No. There was no way out. A cot . . . a straw pallet flung over three boards laid on low trestles . . . a stub of candle stuck to the recessed masonry of the window-sill with a dab of its own drippings, the lower three or four feet of plastering broken away from the wall so that what was left resembled nothing so much as the silhouette of a miniature forest . . . but no way out. And yet he had to explain to some one that it was all a mistake.

The door complained noisily to its hinges as the heavy panels were swung back.

"About my being brisk to you a little while ago, and possibly even rude," said the young lieutenant from the entryway. "I did not mean to be unfriendly, you understand. I want to say, if there is anything I can do for you, just let me know. It is a pity about tomorrow morning, but if there is anything in my power that will make it easier, you have only to speak."

"I should like to explain that this whole thing is a mistake. You must know that . . ."

"No use trying to explain to them. As a matter of fact,

there have been orders for a long time that everybody connected with that foolish newspaper of yours in El Paso is to be executed the moment he sets foot on Mexican soil. You have all been declared beyond the pale of the law. The trial was no more than an official gesture. Every one of you has been formally proscribed long ago. So there's no use trying to explain anything. Haven't I been trying to explain to them all the night long? You understand, there is a big *fiesta* tonight—well, of course, you were out there. But I want to say: I was on duty last night, all night. I did not mind. In fact, I was glad, because I thought naturally that I would be off duty tonight. Turn and turn about. But do you think they paid any attention whatever to me? Hah! Ask the stones in the street to pay attention. Just because I am the junior officer, they put everything on me, and what can I do? Nothing!"

"But you do not understand. They said I was to be shot in the morning."

"Yes, I know. I'm as sorry as I can be, but that will not do any good. However, I want to say: just because I was out of patience a little while ago, do not think it was personal, that I bore you any malice. Is there anything I can get for you? Cigarettes? A bottle of wine? Something stronger, perhaps?"

"No, there is nothing."

"Anything you want to send to your people? Your watch? Anything of that sort?"

"No, I do not even possess a watch."

"Possibly you would like to write some letters, then? I can have them bring you a candle, a pencil and some paper. Really, I would like to do something, just to show that . . ."

"No, there is no one to whom I want to write."

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"Or I could write a letter for you, if you will give me the name of any one you want notified."

"I think it is better they should not know. They will imagine I am still wandering somewhere out in the world."

"You understand now, do you not, there was nothing personal in my attitude of a little while ago. I want to say: in my seeming rudeness. Quite the contrary, in fact. I had simply come to the end of my patience, but that was not because of your case. Figure it! I was so sure I would be off duty tonight, having been on duty all last night, that I sent word to my woman I would come to her, and you may well believe she is the kind who will not wait, she has the temper of the very devil. I will stake you my life she is off with some one else right now, drinking, skylarking, and having a jolly time; and here am I, stuck in this pest-hole for the entire night, twice in succession. Do you think she will give me an opportunity to explain? Hah! No more than did those colonels and captains."

The words registered definitely with Desiderio at last. Disjointed thoughts seemed to be falling into place like the parts of a plaster piece-mold, each clicking into its appointed position. He understood things now. The panicky confusion had given way to an almost crystalline clarity, hard and bright. He would be shot at dawn. Well, he was not afraid. Not much afraid. Not yet afraid, at least. Only the other day he had said it would be a jest if he lost his life in the revolution just when he had no more than come into his own, and now the jest was being played out.

It was a pity to go into nothingness before finding his valley, but apparently no one seemed to be able to do anything about it. Should he send for a bottle of cognac? Drug himself into a stupor, so that he might live through these last hours uncaring and heedless of what was done to

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him? No, that would be a piece of rank stupidity, a waste of his only remaining opportunity to receive impressions from the world he was so soon to quit. He must use every available moment for perception: the keener, the better. There was so little time left for feeling pleasure or pain. By tomorrow he would cease to live, he would have no more sentience. For him the intricate patterning of leaves and twigs, sharply etched against the radiance of the sky, would no longer exist; the blaze of crowded stars from a black firmament; the sound of a voice upraised in song; the tender modeling of the body of a young girl, the delirious pounding of pulses in ecstatic clamor for liberation . . .

He broke his silence.

"There is indeed something you can do for me, friend," he said to the officer.

"To be sure, then."

"Look . . . I would like to be with a woman this night. Will you help to bring her to me?"

"A woman!"

"I will give you the address of a brothel in El Paso."

"But look here, now. I want to say: you can't possibly be serious about this. It . . . it is not natural. You do not know what you say. If you had called for a priest, now, that would be something different. That is what most of them . . ."

"No, I do not want a priest."

"But a man facing death, on the brink of the next world, isn't it the natural thing for him to want to commune with God and prepare for . . ."

"I would rather commune with a woman, if it can be arranged—and I have money enough to make it well worth her while."

"Well, I suppose you know best what you want. Per-

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haps, yes, it could be done. I could not say with any certainty until . . . still, it is an unheard-of thing. A woman!"

"And, if possible, one particular one whose name I will give you. If not, any other one, as long as she is no lousy gutter-slut. Surely there must be somewhere a young one, a pretty one, not yet hardened by the sort of life she leads. I have money here, in American banknotes, and it will all be hers. Can you do this for me?"

"Well, to be sure, there are no written rules to govern taste, and whatever I might happen to think about the propriety of using one's last hours . . . However, if you will concede me a little time, I will see what can be done. As I told you, I myself am not permitted to leave. But there is a young friend of mine outside, an American, we were to have made a party together tonight. He has a way with him when it comes to women. I want to say: he knows how to persuade them, and he will succeed if any one can."

"Then good. Let him go to this house on Third Street in El Paso . . ."—Desiderio tore a leaf from his notebook and passed it across to the lieutenant—"and let him ask for Marta. Marta Tovar, perhaps. She must not know who sends for her, however. And if she will not come, then another. One to suit his own taste. Bear in mind there are not many hours left me."

"Do not say another word, my old one. As soon as it may ever be possible, I will open this door once more and when I do, it will be to let a little dove slip in to keep you company."

Desiderio turned toward the block of faintly rarefied blackness, with its transecting bars, that represented the window. He thought: Perhaps she will refuse to come. Perhaps I should have let him tell her who I am. But no

. . . this way, if she comes, and is not prepared, I will know. And if she does not come it is as well I do not know. I think I understand, now, how Chago must have felt when he cast aside his cassock. Perhaps there are worse things than this. A broken old age, for example. As it is, I shall never know the weakness of failing power. What folly! I am just talking to reassure myself, to keep up my courage. I do not want to die. I do not want to stop being myself. There are so many, many new places still to see. If I had but stopped to think, this need not have happened . . . but perhaps it would have happened, anyway. To each saint comes his feast day, to every man his hour . . . and now there will be no more great jests for me to play on the world. The world is playing one on me. . . . I wonder if it will be Marta or some other . . . I wonder . . .

Though he could see nothing beyond the window, the sounds of talk from other prisoners, squabbling noisily among themselves, came to him through the night. Occasional flashes of reflected radiance marked the setting off of fireworks. If he had not wanted to see that display, if he had gone direct to the railway station instead of to the plaza, he might now be in a littered carriage, already speeding southward, laughing and chatting with fellow-passengers. He was right in deciding not to send any letters. Indeed, it was well possible that over the course of more than three years his family had forgotten him except as a name. He had changed much in that period. True, as time went on, they would wonder what had become of him; but less and less frequently with the passage of the years, and in the end he would be only some one vaguely remembered, and no one would be torn by sharp grief.

He heard the creak of hinges. Without turning his body, he cast a swift glance over his shoulder and saw the two

silhouettes black against the yellow light beyond the doorway.

"Here you are, *amiguito*," the lieutenant informed him cheerily, "and I want to say: my friend did himself proud. Now not another word! I know what you want me to do, and that is to withdraw. Naturally, you desire to be alone. That understands itself. But if there should be anything else, consider me wholly at your service . . . Then enter, *morenita*, so that I can close the portal and leave. Very good nights to you both. No more than think, if they had not stuck me on this post again, two nights in succession, which you must admit is anything but fair, they only do it because I am the junior officer and cannot help . . . "

He talked himself out of the cell, and the dull sound of the closing door, with the muffled noises of replaced fastenings, shut off the chatter of his speech. Desiderio could feel that the girl had stepped forward and now stood near him. He moved to one side, without looking around, to make place for her at the window. He felt an unwonted constraint, a curiously disturbing sense of embarrassment.

*Morenita*, little dark one, the lieutenant had called her. That might be Marta, of course. It might be almost any one. What if this were some frayed and tawdry strumpet. Suppose they had been able to persuade only one of those grown callous through the long years in which she had sold her body to shame? In that case, it would all have been for nothing. He would send her about her business. Pay her, of course, but that would be all.

"In just a moment I will light the candle," he said, his voice as casual as he could make it. If he were fated to disappointment, at least he could defer the blow for a little while.

He stooped to the low window-sill and struck a match

## THE WEDGE

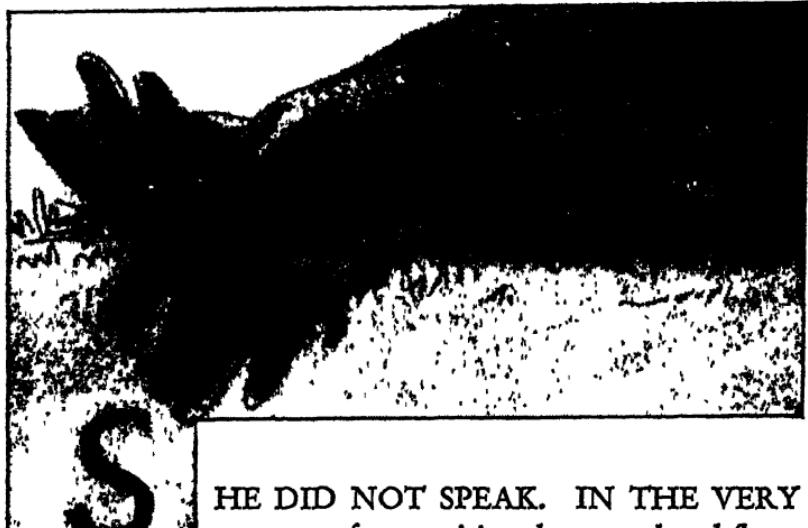
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on the rough masonry, shielding the tiny blaze with cupped hands against the whispering stir of night air from without. While he applied wavering flame to the charred stub of the candle-wick, he stole a look at the floor where she stood, and his heart began to beat more rapidly when he saw her ankles were slim and her shoes neat. Shaking the match to extinguish it, he rose, conscious of the cloying tremor of eagerness.

Then, for the space between one breath and the next, all honied ardor was quenched. The fitful and erratic gleam of candle-light revealed her to him. As on the day before, a bubble of fear within him expanded swiftly and burst, sending its chill to every recess of his being.

"Marta!" he whispered.





SHE DID NOT SPEAK. IN THE VERY moment of recognition she turned and flung herself headlong at the door. The need for action restored him to reality. Stepping between her and the thick panels against which she beat her small fists, he caught her to him, but there was nothing amorous in what he did.

"Don't, Marta," he pleaded gently. "Please don't! Everything is going to be all right. Do not be afraid. No one is going to hurt you. I will let nothing harm you here."

He cherished her as he might have soothed a child dismayed by the nameless terrors of an unlighted passageway at night. He led her to the cot, made her sit on the edge of the pallet, and knelt before her, his hands clasped about hers, his head thrown back to see the features she sought to hide from him.

"Don't you understand, *corazón*? Something real has happened to us. Something I have wanted so much. There is so little time left and I wanted us to face that time together."

The girl began to cry softly, fumbling at the handbag on the pallet beside her; but he forestalled her, taking a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbing awkwardly at her eyes.

"There, there, my soul. You'll feel better in a moment. When I saw you in El Paso yesterday, and followed you to your door, I felt as though I were being torn by buzzards . . . Indeed I know what a shock you must have had . . . but truly, Marta, now I think it must have been you I was searching for all along, all these years when I have been up and down the world . . . I thought I was fleeing from you, but in reality I was fleeing from the loneliness and the hunger for you . . . don't cry, little life, everything is all right."

"I feel so ashamed," she whispered brokenly.

"Dearest one, do not say such things. Why do you suppose I sent for you? Can't you see what it means to me to have you here? To know that you have not forgotten me, that you cared, that it was not as I . . . Oh, God in Heaven! I am the one who is forgetting! This is my last night. I die tomorrow."

"And you find me a woman who comes to men in their cells, who takes money to . . . Oh, Lello, Lello! Let it be myself! Let it be me that is taken out to be shot in the morning."

"Hush, little heart. Do not speak for a moment, because my mind is spinning and confused. I know only that there is something here that must be made clear, and I am trying to work it out. This is what I am thinking, *corazón*. You gave me love. You were the first. My first love. My first rapture and my first pain. And now that I have come to the end of the way, at the very last I have again my first happiness. That is nothing for tears, little life. That is something so wonderful! So beautiful!"

"But look at me," she cried hysterically. "Here! See what this beautiful first love of yours has become. A woman to be purchased by any one who . . ."

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Gently he placed his hand over her lips.

"Whatever you are or have been to the living is of no consequence here. Consider: tonight is for us a new life. We are seeing a new place. If I were free to come and go as I wished, to look for a certain valley I had thought to find, perhaps it would matter, this thing I do not want you to say. Perhaps it would hurt us and tear us, as I was torn yesterday. But I think not. For you are Marta. My Marta. That is something real, and the other is only some words you must not even utter. I think perhaps I can even be glad it is this way now, because tonight, as things are, of what consequence is anything except that you are here?"

She smiled wistfully.

"That long-ago of ours, Lello, it was very beautiful, wasn't it?"

"It is still beautiful, Marta. It will always be beautiful to me now, for it will be with me . . . as long as I live."

He raised his face to hers as he knelt, and she took it between her hands.

"Marta," he whispered, "do you remember a day by the river? The day of the picnic? When I said that some time I would tell you something?"

She nodded, her eyes searching his, but she spoke no word.

"And you said that perhaps you would tell me something too? Do you remember that, Marta?"

He felt warm tears fall upon his upturned face.

"This is what I was going to tell you: I love you, Marta. You said you might tell me something. Tell me . . . now."

She bent toward him.

"I love you, Lello," she murmured. "And as God sees us tonight I have never really loved any one else."

And now weakness seized him, so that he sank forward,

burying his face in her lap. And now it was he who sobbed convulsively: great, tearing man-sobs that racked his whole body. And now she soothed him with broken, whispered endearments, stroking his thick black hair. They did not know when the candle guttered out. They did not know the cell was in darkness.

And after a time she said:

"Dearest one, I can feel the beating of your heart."

"It wants to leave the prison-cage of my breast and join your heart. It is beating only for you."

"But they are going to take you from me."

"True, but I will have the best of them, for they cannot take you from me. God knows I do not want to die, but since you are all there is to me of life, they cannot rob me of it."

Later she said:

"Do you remember the wreath you made for me?"

"And how I thought, that other time, that you were laughing because you did not care!"

"Every night I prayed and prayed to the Virgin to bring you back. I knelt before the shrine in my room . . ."

"And all the while I was going about the world, up and down, up and down, seeing a new place, only to begin at once the search for another one, and never realizing what it was I sought until I looked into your eyes tonight."

"You were stooped over the candle, lighting it, and I could not see your face. I did not recognize you. I had been standing close, close beside you, and still I did not know who it was. How many girls have told you that you are handsome?"

"Do not be silly, heart. Has any one ever before called you a valley? Because that is how I think of you now, Marta. As my valley."

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"Your valley, then. I do not know what it means, but anything you like, to you."

"Marta."

"Yes, Lello?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too. But the night is so short. They must not take you yet. What time will it be?"

"Do not tremble, little heaven. I do not know what time it is. I do not even want to know. Do you remember when I met you and your mother at the Analco Church after mass that first Sunday? How I pretended Arroyo had sent me on an errand?"

And another time she broke the silence, whispering:

"You have not asked me what happened after you left. I mean, you have not asked me what made me . . . what you said I must not say."

"It was what they call God, I suppose, since it brought us together. Perhaps there is some other word for it, but I do not know how else to say it."

"That is not what I meant, Lello."

"That is enough for me, none the less. Do you expect me to quarrel with what has brought me such happiness as I have never before known?"

"But in the morning . . . No! It must not be. I want you to promise me something, Lello. Just before they come to take you away, you must kill me."

"Little dark one, do not speak like that. You are trembling again."

"But how can I go on, after you leave? Do you expect me to go . . . back to . . . a life that ended when I came to what you said was a new place here? You say I have brought you happiness because I am the last thing you

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will know. But I want that happiness, too. I want you to be the last thing I will know."

"Hush, beloved. That is something of which you must not even think."

"But, Lello, heart, think of our two souls meeting tomorrow to be together forever. Surely the Virgin will intercede for us, our sins will be forgiven, two white souls in a new life that will not end with the coming of tomorrow's sunrise, but . . ."

"Please, Marta. Please, dearest one. Forget that there is to be a future and think only of this: to us there is a present still. Tell me something. Something that I want so very much to hear."

"If you will tell me something first."

"I love you, Marta."

"I love you, Lello."

"Do not move, *corazón*. Do not leave me."

"Only for a moment."

"But my arms feel so empty when they are not drawn about you."

"I return at once. See, here I am."

"I forgive you this one single time, little life, but see that it does not happen again. Promise. Promise you will not leave me."

"I promise. But you will leave me so soon . . . so very soon!"

"Not until death comes to part us. How many lovers have sworn that? For us it will be real."

"Will they let me go with you to that place, do you think?"

"You must not even permit them to see you. When they come for me in the morning, turn your face away, and then

slip out after we are gone when no one . . . Why, what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

"I thought something had hurt you?"

"No, dear one . . . nothing. Everything is . . . all right . . . now."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes . . . absolutely! Lello!"

"Yes?"

"Tell me . . . something."

"I love you, little life."

"Tell me . . . again . . . tell me . . . over and over and . . ."

"Marta, Marta! What have you done? What has happened with you? What is the matter?"

"Tell me . . ."

"Marta!"

"I want . . . it to be . . . the last thing . . . I hear . . . Lello . . . tell me . . ."

When he had struck a match he saw the ornamental head of the long hatpin at her breast, and at first he was surprised there was no blood. He caught her lips to his as though to draw her last breath into his body, perhaps to kindle new life upon them by the very flame of his own. But he realized almost at once that the end had come, and he shrank from the theatrical posturings of uncontrolled grief.

He rose and dressed. The squad would call for him soon enough. He bent over the pallet and composed her limbs with a sculptor's sense of line and form to simulate the position of one who sleeps. They would not find out until afterwards, thus, what was amiss. By that time, of course, it would not matter to either of them what others thought,

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even though they might believe it was he who had killed her.

He knelt on the floor, his forehead against the edge of the pallet. He thought: I suppose I should pray.

Then he thought: No. It would be shameful of me to dissimulate now, because this has been so real and so beautiful, and has meant so much.

He was still kneeling beside the cot when he heard the fumbling of hands at the iron that fastened the door.

He motioned the officer to silence, cautioning him, forefinger on lip, to make no noise. The young lieutenant nodded comprehendingly, glad there was to be no scene. His only fear had been that the girl might become hysterical from fright. He and his prisoner tiptoed softly out of the cell, which was left unlocked. A dozen soldiers and a captain, whose red-rimmed eyes betokened want of sleep, awaited them.

Desiderio and the officer who had befriended him embraced in a silent farewell. Six of the soldiers fell into single file on each side. Darkness still cloaked the city, but pallor was already beginning to gray the eastern horizon. Here and there, an early rising housewife swept the street and the sidewalk before her door. By the time the silent procession had reached the execution-ground, the whole city would be astir with just such commonplace preparations for another day of activity.

Desiderio thought: They will be doing the same unimportant things, and it will make no difference to any one but myself that I am no longer part of it. I feel empty and cold inside. But it does not seem to be fear. Why am I annoyed because it is so far to the cemetery? The farther it is, the longer I live. I hope I shall not be afraid and lose poise. At least, I hope I can conceal my fear. Though it

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will make no difference. They will joke about it on the way back, whichever way I act. I suppose it is just something like my valley, or like wanting to see a new place . . . I did not know why I wanted those things, but I wanted them, just the same. I want them to think me courageous just because I want it.

They passed through the cemetery gate. He stood before the far wall. The muzzles of the rifles looked like staring eyes, very round and very black, and he saw the captain draw and raise his sword. Perhaps it would not be so very bad. After all, it was no more than going to see a new















